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The Inner Voices of the Changing Times: The Journey of the Mangyan Elders in Governance Practices

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ABSTRACT: Organizational success depends on the quality of its leadership. Furthermore, context-specific leadership theories are essential in recognizing the potential of indigenous traditions and practices in interpreting leadership practices in a local context. To understand context-specific leadership theories, we need to study indigenous leadership. This study about Mangyan leadership adds to the conversation about indigenous leadership by highlighting the elders' situations and indigenous leadership practices. Mangyan elders are grounded in experience and represent specific contexts, inherent values, beliefs, and circumstances. The study revealed three highlights: 1.) The Hagura Mangyan communities have their political structure composed of the indigenous elders as a fundamental component. 2.) Hybrid government-indigenous leadership and governance create tensions and conflicts with indigenous leadership practices. 3.) As the customary law practices of the communities are slowly eroding, the elder leadership is also weakening due to the imposition of the government's political system.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous leadership, elders, governance, context-specific leadership, Hagura Mangyan

INTRODUCTION

Significantly, the literature affirms that the success of any organization depends mainly on the quality of its leadership. However, most of the studies conducted about leadership primarily used different theories. These theories are also developed and validated through the lens of unfamiliar perspectives. Hence, if these theories are applied to guiding leaders, such studies would either be irrelevant or help solve the wrong problem (Von Glinow & Teagarden, 2009). It is, therefore, relevant to recognize and begin to accommodate one's indigenous traditions and practices to see their potential in predicting and interpreting leadership practices in a local context.

If we want to understand leadership in various contexts and the phenomenon of context-specific leadership theories (Leung, 2012), we must first study indigenous leadership. Studying "local leadership phenomena" is an ongoing interpretation of meaning produced by individuals engaged in the local leadership process (Zhang et al., 2012, p.1072). Many factors, when studying leadership phenomena, are to be considered. These elements include the historical background of how a leader matures in the leadership process, the social structure of a specific context, and the value systems and behavioral models that impact the administration. As these factors are contextually unique, it requires understanding the indigenous leadership approach. Indigenous leadership demonstrates knowledge of indigenous paradigms, such as prevailing value orientations, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of indigenous culture through language, ceremony, and oral histories and stories (Young, 2006).

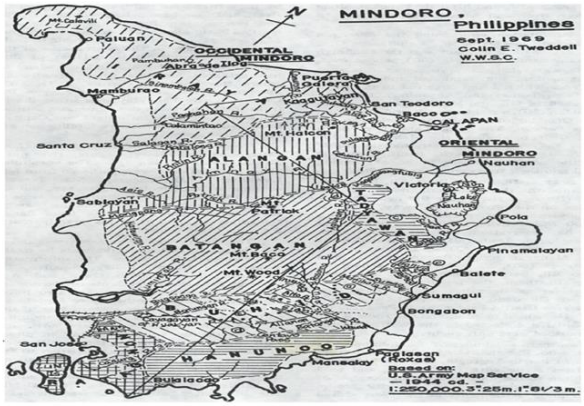
Further, the author mentioned that the indigenous elders were a valuable source of this indigenous knowledge as they provide intergenerational leadership through the sharing of their teachings, oral histories, and experiences. To non-indigenous people, "elder" may be understood simply as a noun implying a title. However, from the indigenous lens, this word is more than just a person of greater age. In their native languages, it is a verb characterizing the role of someone in the community. Elders are regarded traditionally as indicators of good leadership. They serve as cultural guides and active participants in community governance and decision-making. They are also aware of and responsive to community needs without regard for ego or power-driven motives.

Currently, the roles of the indigenous elders are challenged by internal and external forces in the changing world. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Tauili-Corpuz (2020) confirmed that Indigenous Peoples continue to face

a high level of "discrimination, racism, economic, and social disadvantages" worldwide. In her earlier report, she also mentioned that access to justice and keeping their legal systems running are two of the main worries of IPs worldwide.

However, the purpose of elders is still crucial in pursuing the indigenous people's struggle for self-determination. Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination is a fundamental right based on international law principles. The law includes provisions that ensure natives' rights in their respective countries. Not only their culture and traditions but the law also ensures their freedom to participate in decision-making about their concern about land and territory rights, improving social and economic conditions, and maintaining and developing their traditional knowledge.

A needs assessment was conducted on the two Mangyan communities in Occidental Mindoro. The assessment was part of the Far Eastern University's Community Extension Service Project in collaboration with the Divine Word College of San Jose (DWCSJ), a co-educational academic institution run by missionaries from the Society of the Divine Word. The indigenous peoples of Mindoro, Philippines, are known as Mangyans. The etymology of the word "Mangyan" is still unclear even today. Barbian (1977) assumes that the word is a combination of the prefix "mang," which means "one from a certain place," and the root word "yan," which means "that place," interpreting "Mangyan" as "the people from that place." Generally, they called themselves Mangyan to distinguish themselves from the lowland settlers and invaders. The first to show the denomination and tribal distribution of the natives was Conklin's map in 1942 (Twedell, 1970). He designated the names of the Mangyan tribes and presented them in the anthropological world when he studied and recorded the different languages of the natives. Tweddell, on the other hand, published his article on the Identity and Distribution of the Mangyan Tribes in Mindoro in 1970 and included a map depicting the actual distribution of the seven Mangyan tribes, including the Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Buhid, Batangan, Hanunuo, and Ratagnon. It specifically identified the boundaries of the tribal territories. The editors of the Ethnographic Map of the Philippines accepted his map of the Mangyan tribal distribution in Mindoro. Finally, in 1974, it was published by the National Museum.



The needs assessment was conducted among the Ratagnon Mangyan and Hanunuo Mangyan communities. This assessment is part of the five-year partnership for community extension services for both institutions. Both institutions envision the institutionalization of independent Mangyan schools and districts that validate the Mangyan history, knowledge, language, and culture and strengthen their competencies to navigate the complexities of the contemporary world. The assessment involved dialogue with the community and its indigenous leaders and elders. As an observation, the Mangyan elders' leaders showed wisdom in their words and actions. They discussed the power dynamics in their community, specifically focusing on issues surrounding their ancestral domain claims. The elders' activities and speaking styles were critical in fostering community and social cohesion. This observation piqued the researchers' interest in deepening our understanding of Mangyan elders' roles in shaping their indigenous governance.

"Indigenous Elders," as defined by the Council on Aboriginal Initiatives (2012), are considered exceptionally wise and recognized because of their wisdom and ability to know the appropriate solution in a particular situation. Community members also highly regard them because they guide the people with sound judgment. Indigenous elders in the indigenous community are expected to maintain the culture and pass down traditional cultural knowledge (Carter, 2011). Indigenous people in the community assume that their elders have "authentic" knowledge of their past cultures, have high regard for them, and follow what their elders have taught them. They are known as "elders" because of their age and experience, and they make up most of the village's decision-makers. The Mangyan tribes considered their elders supreme rulers (Javier, 1987).

Surprisingly, researchers pay little attention to indigenous elders' influence on indigenous community governance practices. Less reliable data on indigenous elders and their political practice contributions is available. The Council on Aboriginal Initiatives (2012) study revealed insufficient critical scholarly papers and materials for discussing the indigenous elders' discourse. Buendia, Mendoza, & Sambeli (2006) also observed the shortage of literature that deals with the elders and their roles in indigenous

governance in the Philippines, even if it is notable worldwide that the indigenous communities' political system has survived the 21st century. The available data also assume that their culture inhabits the indigenous knowledge of the elders. Furthermore, the culture and their approach to community leadership are linked. Literature highly recommends exploring indigenous governance from the perspective of indigenous knowledge and its relevance to the existing state political system for a better understanding of their relationship and disassociation.

This paper would like to investigate the value and relevance of the Mangyan Indigenous Elders in sustaining the traditional political system despite the changing times and situations in their governance practice due to the imposition of the state system. Therefore, this paper will examine the experiences of the Mangyan Indigenous Elders in governance practice and their perceived relevance to the present political system of the tribe. As researchers, we believe this documentation will provide the Mangyan communities with accessible information on leadership and governance practices inherited from their ancestors. These testimonials will pave the way for preserving their customs and traditions in governance without formal codification. According to the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact (AIPP, 2007), the risk of a formal codification is the promotion of uniform modes that do not fit different socio-cultural contexts, which the traditional system can generally accommodate. Furthermore, this research intends to be published in a reputable academic journal to increase its value, as the knowledge we will impart will be a permanent and searchable document.

Statement of the Problem

This qualitative study examines the governance practices of the Mangyan Indigenous Elders and their perceived relevance to the present political system of the tribe. Specifically, the researchers would like to elicit answers to the following questions:

1. What is the typical structure of leadership among the Hagura tribes? How does the community in the leadership structure regard its indigenous elders?
2. How do the Hagura elders fit into integrating the state into their traditional political system?
3. How does state integration affect the role of Indigenous elders in their traditional political system?

RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review looks at information about indigenous elders, how they fit into the traditional political structure in their local communities, and what roles they play. The discussion will also focus on the different views about government mandates and their consequences for the governance practices of the indigenous elders. Identifying some topic analysis, findings, and evaluation would add intensity and context to the study.

Indigenous Knowledge As A Tool For Indigenous Leadership Structure

People living in the past are immersed in their surroundings. That is why they can effectively commune and manage their environment. This knowledge of their environment is typically particular and detailed. As the literature describes, "indigenous knowledge" is the traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities that has developed over centuries and transferred from generation to generation in working and life situations. People's indigenous knowledge is unique because it entails their interpretation of their culture, communities, language, and even their genealogy-land relationship. Indigenous knowledge represents the local and culturally specific knowledge of a dynamic people, adapting over time and place (Battiste, 2005). Battiste and Henderson (2000, in Hare, 2011) reinforce the description of indigenous knowledge as a "complete knowledge system with its epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity." Indigenous scholars contend that to represent indigenous communities' self-determined goals adequately, researchers should respect this unique knowledge (Young, 2006).

Archibald (2005) affirms indigenous knowledge as empowering, decolonizing, contextual, ethical, and favorable to the indigenous community's standard protocol and cultural practices. The secure contextual and cultural connections make indigenous knowledge an essential part of indigenous people's lives, providing the necessary means for survival (Magni, 2017). This indigenous knowledge is crucial for indigenous cultures' sustainability and maintenance. On a similar note, Wolfgramm, Spiller & Voyageur (2016) argue that common and culturally relevant forms of leadership matter most for Indigenous peoples. Their indigenous leaders are developed within a community context of affection, affiliation, and education. They learned to practice traditional governance by living independently with their respective clans or groups.

The basic principle of indigenous leadership and governance is to sustain their way of life by communing with their land and natural resources. Their knowledge revolves around ecological principles, recognizing the environmental systems' relationship and interrelatedness in supporting and sustaining their existence. Even the scientific community recognizes indigenous governance mechanisms constituting preservation and viable development. Indigenous knowledge is still a big part of how

indigenous people run their governments, and the rules are based on their sound and time-tested ways of doing things (Carling et al., 2004).

In the Philippines, according to Tauli-Corpuz (2019), it was concluded that to say that indigenous knowledge is rapidly diminishing because of conversion and modernization has something to prove further through research and the mass of literature. She strongly argued that the Philippine indigenous knowledge systems about health, natural resource management, agriculture and forestry, governance, and conflict resolution, among others, are alive and persisting among Indigenous peoples. This argument is a validation that the recognition of this indigenous knowledge, especially around indigenous leadership, is significant in understanding how they sustain the existence of their indigenous territories. More so, Buendia et al. (2006), in their analysis of the indigenous governance practices in the Philippines, concluded that "peoples' culture is one of the defining features of IP governance and development" (p. 2). The study gave credence to one's culture, which regulates people's conception of how and why they live for themselves and others in a place where they belong. Indigenous knowledge is deeply rooted in indigenous culture and protocols for maintaining a reciprocal relationship in the community.

The collaborative work of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) in 2012 identified the basic principles of indigenous governance, which describe traditional democratic leadership and governance. These are sovereignty and self-rule; collective identity, collective rights, and collective leadership; self-determination; harmony and interaction with nature; international solidarity among indigenous peoples; linkage with more extensive social and political movements; sustainability; spirituality; and dignity. For this indigenous knowledge to be passed down and maintained by the generations to come, Hare (2011) assumes that the indigenous elders have a great responsibility to ensure the preservation and transmission of culture. Couture (1991, pp.181-200) describes indigenous elders as historians, philosophers, and teachers of indigenous traditions and heritage. They also teach the next generations of their community how to make meaning of history, connect it to the present situation, and indicate safe directions to pursue so that their history can be sustained and advanced.

The Indigenous Elders and Their Concept of Governance

The noun "elder" may mean "old ones" or a senior citizen who must earn respect due to old age. They may not have acquired any unique role as an older adult. Literature and studies about indigenous leadership affirmed that indigenous peoples treated their elders as a rigid body because of their combined expertise and wisdom (Young, 2006). To be an indigenous elder is something that one must earn. It happens through the affirmation of the members of a community. They acquired the status based on the trust given to them by the people because they demonstrated lifelong exemplary behavior and service in the community. They have developed the ability to guide considerable talent over time. They used this talent as a necessity for the basic survival of the community—in healing, leading, and teaching (Young, 2006). Harris (1991), an anthropologist at the University of Florida, concludes that in the history of our ancestors, the chieftains had no formal authority or power. However, they had the gifted ability to persuade.

The Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA) and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP, 2012) declared that the elders of the community serve as the primary source of authority among the many indigenous peoples. In many indigenous communities, they are recognized by the people as both traditional and new leaders. This statement is an acknowledgement of their community's influence. The document identified their essential responsibility in a community:

- Provide continuity or connection from the past, present, and future through the community's collective memory.
- Practice, enforce, and transmit customary laws.
- Hold, protect, and teach indigenous knowledge developed through generations.
- Dispense justice to maintain harmony in society.
- Oversee the sustainable management of natural resources.
- Resolve conflicts among the members of the community.
- Lead in defense of land, territory, resources, and people from outside incursions.
- Guide the spiritual and cultural lives of the people.
- Build solidarity within and outside the community.

As traditional leaders, people anticipated they would influence and guide the present generation to practice their indigenous way of life, help sustain peace and order among members, and support maintaining the balance of the environment around them. In the Cordillera regions in Mindanao, for instance, they regard their Indigenous Elders as the council of aged men who prove their leadership in Practice. For them, an elder must not only have wisdom and fair judgment but also embody with them the customs and traditions of the past, set an example, and be someone to rely on in times of crisis. In the same way, the study by Buendia et al. (2006) among the Gaddangs, Ibanags, and Ivatans of Nueva Vizcaya shows how the elders were revered

and had significant influence even on the local leaders of each community. Meager records of these tribes also proved that the tribal councils involved indigenous elders assigned to be of authority in the community.

The same study mentioned that on selected indigenous peoples' governance systems in the Philippines, the result was striking in how the roles of indigenous elders in different regions were always a vital part of their governance. The Ibaloys regard their elders as the village's wise men. The community likewise acknowledges their decisions as law. The Bontoks of Cordillera treated their council of elders as the core of village decision-makers. The authority, power, and legitimacy of the Tingguians rest squarely on the shoulders of their council of elders. They have established guidelines, laws, and protocols to preserve and guard their natural resources. The elder of the Teduray people takes on the role of leader. This person must be able to persuade and influence others, be an excellent speaker, and have knowledge of customary law.

In the same way, the datus or elders of other indigenous tribes, such as the Datus in B'laan communities, were the most distinctive and respected members of the tribe because of their ability to articulate tribal values and serve as mediators when disagreements arose. The fulong in B'laan communities served the same function. Besides, the chief and a council of elders share their power in the Tigbao Subanen tribe. The people strictly follow their words. The Maranao ethnic group, although headed by a Sultan, has also had its council of elders assists him with his tasks.

In like manner, the study of Eder (2013) about the Batak indigenous group in Central Luzon witnessed how elders or older males with qualified personalities surfaced as their leaders. Even the Mindanao indigenous communities have the same reverence for their elders, and their roles are very prominent. In the same study by Buendia et al., (2006), the authors cited the description of Maceda (1975) about the Mamanua group. It was mentioned that these particular indigenous community members chose their ancestors to serve as chieftains. Because of their superior intelligence and the significant decisions they made during consultations, the members admired and respected the chieftains. The Manuvu tribe had the same general impression regarding the situation. Although the datu, as the head of the population, is the commander-in-chief, the council of elders, known for their intelligence, integrity, and prudence, still assists him. The Mandayas in Davao del Norte have an older adult respected and obeyed by the village people. They also acted as advisers to the people and were followed for necessary decisions in the community. They also acted as judges, mediators, and facilitators of meetings and gatherings. Being in the highest position, the elders can decide the form of punishment appropriate for a crime committed by the members. In Davao Oriental, a Bagani consulted a council of elders on matters like reviewing petitions from commoners about taking revenge against another outside their territory through pangayaw (warfare). They were also requested to hear, mediate, and resolve intra-domain disputes like theft, adultery, and violence.

Young (2006), in his personal experience with the indigenous peoples, recognized that indigenous knowledge highly regards the perspective of elders as they provide valuable cultural information required for understanding and promoting decisive indigenous leadership. In addition to this recognition, the author also perceived social teachings from the indigenous elders as a valuable supplement to developing indigenous leadership literature and insight into positive indigenous identity and leadership practices. Then, understanding the elders' original values, ethics, and methods creates a pedagogy that can bring about change and success for the community and its people.

As a result, it seems reasonable to argue that it is critical to recognize Indigenous Elders as leaders from the past and present. They are responsible for passing on this indigenous knowledge to sustain it for future generations. The knowledge they got from generations before them is the basis for recognizing their selfless work to keep their unique system culture alive.

State System and Its Effect on Indigenous System Of Governance

From the account of Harris (1991), people from prehistoric times lived in small, nomadic hunting-and-gathering groups before settling down into villages without someone predominantly leading them. They survived as bands by being generous to one another, which resulted in the idea of reciprocal exchange. Quoting anthropologist Richard Gould "Reciprocity is a small society's bank," the author further explained the idea of reciprocal exchange wherein community members do not have expectations of how much or when they expect in return for the things they give. Nature is all public property. What they get from nature is shared equally, and giving is generous. No one is above or in control of natural resources during the reign of reciprocal exchange and egalitarian rulers.

Given this backdrop, Walsh (2016) remarked that despite the indigenous peoples' immense cultural and linguistic diversity, they were able to develop their ways of life in much the same way. The author further noted in her article that, as revealed by studies, indigenous peoples are "the most effective managers and protectors of their territories," which they view as "a partner, a provider, and a living being." This declaration is a clear manifestation that an intimate connection with their lands and natural resources is the bottom line of their identity. Indigenous leadership and governance have been demonstrated. In the Philippines, Domingo (2004) argued, as a result of his study, that indigenous leadership structures and practices effectively governed the daily lives of indigenous peoples for centuries.

The Inner Voices of the Changing Times: The Journey of the Mangyan Elders in Governance Practices

Indigenous peoples have experienced parallel stories of colonialism and assimilation, according to Battiste & Barman (1995). The story of our past makes it known that the same fate happened to most indigenous people's communities as they were the victims of colonization by Western developed nations. Colonizers imposed state laws and policies that exempted them from their specific cultural traditions, customary laws, and ceremonial cycles. Eventually, according to Daes (2008), in most cases, they became 'minorities' due to state expansion. It impeded their political destiny and implied that the lack of "control" was part of being indigenous (Corntassel, 2003, p.87).

Philippine history acknowledged that the first Filipinos lived independently according to their tribes or clans. The natives had their concepts and practices of land use and ownership, which is collectivism. Triandis (2001) stated that people are interdependent within their kin groups in a collectivist culture. They prioritize the goals of their ingroups. "People shape their behavior primarily based on ingroup norms and behave communally." This culture shows how people maintain harmony in group relationships and interdependence. They also followed their traditional governance, cultures, and sociopolitics, centered on their attachment to their land. Over time, they have developed their political structure to maintain a mutual and harmonious inter-community relationship. Due to the marginalization brought by the invasion, they ultimately divided their customary practices. Those who resisted being under the influence of the Spanish system retreated to the hinterlands, while others chose armed resistance. Because the Spanish government never contacted them for religious conversion, they became unassimilated and later tagged as the country's minorities or indigenous peoples. The Regalian Doctrine's imposition worsens the situation, which technically put all the archipelago's lands in the Spanish ruler's ownership during that time. The situation commenced with the denial of ownership and the customary land use of the natives. This rule was sustained when the Spanish regime took over the land's rule.

To add insult to injury, the United States of America even reinforced a national law requiring the registration of land. In contrast, the declaration was made that unregistered lands belong to the government. The American government used these public lands for mining. It made them available for homesteaders and foreign multi-corporations to operate businesses while leaving indigenous refugees in their ancestral domains. This legal concept was carried over after the Philippines gained independence. The post-colonial government passed more laws within this legal framework, further robbing indigenous peoples of their land and resources. The consequences of colonization eroded indigenous peoples' various ways of life, especially indigenous governance since the state system undermined it. This scenario supports the report of the UN Special Rapporteur, Tauli_Corpuz (2018), to the UN General Assembly about indigenous peoples' governance systems. It was stated in the report that the Philippine "indigenous culture continues to decline rapidly because of laws, policies, and programs that tend to strengthen the Regalian doctrine and integrate indigenous peoples into the majority society." (p.50).

Corntassel (2003) cited the report of Erica Irene-Daes, former chairperson and special rapporteur of the WGIP, pointing out that self-determination is the central tenet for indigenous peoples everywhere in the world today's primary symbol of their movements. They demand to address it squarely and insist that it is not negotiable. This statement relates to one of the significant challenges facing the indigenous elders and community in the Philippines. In the Philippines, recognition of the right to self-determination under the Indigenous Peoples Right Act (IPRA) is negated by the constitutional provision underscoring that indigenous cultural communities' rights are subject to national policies and development (Tauli-Corpuz, 2018). The primary obligation of the IPRA is to protect and promote their cultural integrity, their right to own and develop ancestral lands and domains, and their right to free and prior informed consent (FPIC). The FPIC is a protection for indigenous communities. The government, multinational corporations, or any dominant entities must seek FPIC from the concerned indigenous peoples and communities before doing activities that may directly or indirectly affect their territories and everyday functions. However, implementing FPIC has been manipulated, and recognizing ancestral land and domains has been problematic. The situation resulted in conflicts and gross land rights violations (Studies on Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Lao PDR, 2015).

Many changes have happened in the lives of the indigenous peoples, both in their communities and outside their domain. However, the roles of elders are still alive and given importance. In Cordillera, for instance, Solang (2010), in his message on the Tribal Filipino Week Elders and Youth Exchange, mentioned that activist elders and youth have been at the forefront of essential programs and campaigns of the progressive and militant Cordillera people's movement. The author highlighted the role of elders and youth in upholding original socio-political structures. He also mentioned that the leadership of elders brings survival and solidarity to the tribe due to their integrity. They also achieved genuine national democracy without expecting any reward in return.

It is, however, a reality that the responsibilities shouldered by indigenous elders are challenging tasks. They cannot avoid facing internal and external problems and challenges as they perform these roles. Biangalen-Magata et al., (2020) of the Tebtebba

Foundation found that the indigenous people of the Philippines face several external challenges, even though there are laws and programs meant to protect and promote their indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

1. Land and territorial loss: The large-scale mining, putting up of mega-dams, and expansion of mono-crop plantations are significant reasons for displacement from their ancestral lands that weaken their resource management system.
2. Conflicting Policies and Programs: Even though the IPRA law has been in effect for over 20 years, it must provide legal security for recognizing their lands and territories. One example mentioned that hampers indigenous peoples is the Revised Forestry Code (PD 705). The Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health and Nutrition (MNCHN) program is another that invalidates their traditional knowledge. Although the intention is good, the strategies, according to the report, are not sensitive and appropriate to the context of the indigenous communities.
3. Imposition of "new" inappropriate programs and technology: The modern farming methods promoted to indigenous communities do not correspond to the communities' backward planting methods. Modern agriculture hampers the soil, water, and crops, while traditional care for the soil promotes agro-biodiversity.
4. Armed Conflict and Militarization: When people are caught between warring factions, it significantly affects and disrupts their daily lives due to curfews. It restricts their movements to look for food and work. It can also cause them to be displaced.

Some politicians are also easy to lose control of because they are opportunists or use their position to get better chances for themselves. Unfortunately, outside forces like the state, corporate forces, the military, and dominant groups disregard and undermine the authority of indigenous elders and governance (Cordillera Peoples Alliance and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2012). It made it hard for them to follow their customary laws, work as an indigenous institution, and use the indigenous knowledge they had had since the beginning of time.

Under this pressure of the imposition of government laws and policies infused into their traditional system, several issues to resolve further are likely to arise. External factors continue to violate their human rights: the government does not fully recognize indigenous elders, governance systems, and customary laws; indigenous institutions and processes have declined; and distorted the indigenous history. Not to mention the challenges on how the indigenous people's land security and survival are threatened more seriously due to globalization as it opens the few remaining areas of subsistence and shared control. Mindanao and Luzon, to estimate, still experience this history of social neglect, economic and cultural marginalization, and land deprivation as more settlers take over open areas.

The Mangyan Traditional Political System

There is a general assumption in the available literature that there are no clear, rigid political structures for the natives of Mindoro. However, Miyamoto (1988) observes that even if the Mangyan tribes manifested an unclear political system, they nonetheless bestowed reverence and respect on their elders. This instance proved the claim of Helbling and Schult (2004) that, for the Mangyan communities, the indigenous elders played a crucial role in their lives, especially in arbitrating between conflicts. These community elders are looked up to for being knowledgeable in their customary laws and leading the ritual performance of their habitual celebrations. They are also the primary point of contact for resolving problems and conflicts among the people. Domingo (2004), in his study, mentioned that leadership varies among the different Mangyan tribes. However, he also noticed the manifestation of the elders or a group of elders assuming leadership roles. The kuyay (older adults) among the Alangan tribe consider keeping peace and order in the community. They also functioned as the caretakers of the seeds for planting. They acted as priests for agricultural rituals and protectors against the social, political, and economic advantages of the Christians living in the lowland (Kikuchi, 1984). They also have the puon, an overall elder leader whose primary role is establishing social and economic reciprocity and a security system within the gado or local community (Domingo, 2004).

Kikuchi's (1984) study of the Batangan tribe discovered that, customarily, the oldest man in the community becomes their da:naama, or the caretaker of the settlement. The bases for choosing a chieftain were age, a pleasant personality, intelligence, and financial sufficiency, expecting him to bear the debts of his community members if they could not pay them. The author referred to the da: naama's family as a "caretaker-centered kin group" because the Batangan tribe is entrusted to his family from generation to generation.

Although the Buhid group of Mangyans has the fangayatan, who is considered the household leader, the elders' roles, commonly called gurangons, are still prominent. They give the community moral leadership and a point of reference for its members. He acts as the arbiter in disputes and the magico-legal expert since they believe he has access to supernatural help (Javier, 1987).

The Hanunuo group, the most studied group of Mangyans, has no institutionalized or formal sociopolitical leader in this local community (Miyamoto, 1988). They solved conflicts among their family members. However, careful observation reveals that they seek out elders to ask their opinions if the problem can no longer be negotiated at the family level. Elders govern this group by

advising and acting as judges when conflict arises. They are also trusted to provide punishments for the offenders. During rituals for the start of rice planting, the eldest person in the group, who could be male or female, spearheads the rites and is considered the magico-religious leader of the group. A council composed of the former members of the same neighboring settlements or rancherias takes responsibility for settling disputes (Lopez, 1976; Domingo, 2004).

There was no formal judicial and political system with complex structures among the Mangyans, as was common among all the highland groups in the Philippines (Miyamoto, 1988). However, the Mangyans show a keen interest in traditional litigation as a form of legal action when they commit an offense against their customary law or when conflict among members occurs. Miyamoto's observations show that this kind of activity is one of the things that keep their community alive. This law, known as batas to the Mangyan people, differs from how most conflicts are settled traditionally. *Batas* is a Tagalog word that means "manner," "moral," and "convention" and is related to social behavior or a norm. Contrarily, batas for Mangyans connotes "border" or "limit." The Mangyans' batas are their ugali (about personal habits or practices) and are related to social behavior, norms, or customs. The victim generally consults an elder who is well-versed in Mangyan law. The elder usually advises the victim to talk privately with the offender in pursuit of reconciliation. The elder becomes the consultant when asked by both parties. If both parties agree to reconciliation, then a resolution of the conflict is achieved. However, when the damage to the victim is deemed irreconcilable, the elder would advise the victim to escalate the matter to a judge or legal authority under the Mangyan Law.

From the information, it can be concluded that Mangyans maintain peace and order in their communities because they are peaceful, loving people. Wrongdoings can be settled peacefully among the community members with the help of their elders. Reconciliation is always the end goal of every discussion. Elders are generally knowledgeable of the Mangyan law. Due to their vast experiences, elders first solve conflicts within the community. Moreover, it can only be moved up to the legal authorities when the issue is difficult to settle. It is noticeable that the Mangyans honor and respect their elders' roles as advisers.

Also, from the account mentioned above, the conclusion is that indigenous elders are concerned about the future generations of the community's younger members. Thus, they involved themselves and took responsibility for influencing indigenous governance consciously. They are crucial in pursuing the indigenous people's struggle for self-determination, correcting backward anti-people ideas and agendas, and linking with the broader national struggle for freedom and democracy and the international movement for equality and solidarity (Solang, 2010). The only thing that this evidence demonstrates is that the local leaders still respect and have an impact on the elders.

It is essential to observe that the spirit of leadership among indigenous leaders can only ultimately progress by supporting the indigenous elders in the community. They show their self-determination and wisdom in their words and actions. Their sense of making a verdict and building relationships inside and outside the community is why they are always part of the decision-making process. The elders' indigenous knowledge is crucial in ensuring the continuity of indigenous culture as a virtual channel that enables indigenous communities to adapt to recent societal changes (Montillo-Burton, 2008).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research will draw upon the tradition of indigenous wholistic theory, as the main goal is to bring out the voice of the indigenous elders and allow their narratives to speak for themselves. This method is the most relevant theory to consider when working with the indigenous knowledge of elders in a community. It reflects their worldviews connected to their mind, body, heart, and spirit. These four aspects are the very heart of this theory, which will help us with the analysis for understanding the leadership experiences of indigenous elders. Carey (2011) defined *indigenous knowledge* as a "natural science" that describes their way of thinking through a "culturally mediated lens based on participation with nature." Therefore, this interaction with the natural world provided a tool to make the research inclusive rather than an exclusive process (Carey, 2011). Through consciousness, Indigenous wholistic theory seeks connection, relationship, and balance (Laura & Heaney, 1990). This study would like to focus on enhancing indigenous knowledge as a tool in the present political system. Reflecting on the indigenous knowledge of leadership will help the present system acknowledge and accept that this group of people, as an integral part of society, has the right to self-determination, will enhance their cultural knowledge, and could be self-sustaining communities.

Using this theoretical framework will give this study an advantage and an opportunity to make sense of the elders' experiences in aboriginal society. Also, Battiste (2005) thought that an indigenous knowledge framework "creates a new balanced center and a fresh vantage point" when looking at the leadership experiences of indigenous elders rooted in showing how time-tested knowledge is used. UNESCO (Magni, 2017) believed that separating indigenous knowledge from its sociocultural context would render it meaningless and dangerous, potentially leading to misleading interpretations and misusing this knowledge. Guided by the framework, the result of this research can be used to guide the present system. Further practice lenses can be

developed through a holistic evaluation to fill the gaps. They may apply at all levels in all aspects of leadership in a community, organization, or institution.

This framework is whole, ecological, cyclical, and relational (Absolon, 2010). The elder's life represents his being and exemplifies his mutual interconnections with each one in his surroundings: family, community, society, the environment, and the world. This framework proposes to acknowledge established indigenous knowledge and its anti-pioneering knowledge. Scholars writing about indigenous leadership, like Simpson & Turner (2008) and Fraser & Kenny (2012), argue that the best way to defeat the effects of colonization and oppression experienced by the indigenous community is by restoring and intensifying its traditional values and principles. Stories revealed an interconnection to understand the interrelationships between culture, context, and indigenous knowledge, according to the vast literature on indigenous peoples. Bishop (1996), an Indigenous researcher, emphasizes the importance of taking ownership of research on Indigenous peoples' cultural and sociological roots. He further claims that indigenizing the narratives will "correct the stereotyping and mythologizing of the native" (p. 528). As storytellers, indigenous peoples can give an accurate and honest account of their communities (Wolfgramm, Spiller, & Voyaguer, 2016).

As non-indigenous researchers trying to understand how indigenous people live and work, this framework will help us learn more about the real leadership experiences of Mangyan indigenous elders through the lens of indigenous knowledge. This research would also like to demonstrate how the indigenous knowledge of elders provides relevance and a reciprocal relationship to the present system of our government. Their contributions would empower their participation in local governance, and their assistance would be a factor in attaining mutual respect, peace, and cooperation to attain inclusive growth. Give due recognition to the elders' role in preserving indigenous knowledge and proving that their wisdom as leaders promotes flexibility and relevance over time.

If considered, it will help create an indigenous learning theory valid for leadership in the Philippine context.

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of a qualitative research design for this study is to use an ethnography study method. This methodology is viewed as a tool that provides culturally appropriate, essential features to aid in the development of data collection. As Gephart (2004) argues, a qualitative method can provide complete, detailed descriptions of actual actions in real-life contexts that recover and preserve the actual meanings that actors ascribe to these actions and settings (p. 455). It also allows for the exploration of phenomena and interactions in order to reach findings that include thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Besides, Creswell (2007) suggests that a qualitative study makes the participants more receptive and comfortable with the investigative process since it allows them to speak according to their available knowledge based on their experiences and oral histories. Similarly, he notes that in qualitative research, the researcher constructs a multifaceted and comprehensive picture, performs word analysis, reports in-depth accounts from informants, and conducts the research in a natural environment. In the interest of revealing the indigenous knowledge of the indigenous elders, they will be comfortable interacting with the investigative process because the answers are based on their lived experiences, history, and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, Smith (1999) suggests that using the qualitative research methodology to collect information provides a model of responsible research by respecting appropriate cultural conduct in a domestic setting. It is possible to facilitate relevant research that addresses change and benefits among indigenous communities.

An overarching method of ethnography will also be employed in the study. Fetterman (1998) defines *ethnography* as "the art and science of describing a group or culture." It is a standard method used in cultural anthropology that involves direct observation of the culture of others by living among the individuals in a specific community or setting to record lived experiences from the real world (Denzin, 1997). For ethnographic design, participants' perspectives and interpretations allow clear voices to be heard (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). This procedure makes way for a more inclusive process. As the ethnographic design requires immersion in the community, it is a better opportunity for us to interact with the participants and establish a relationship that will guide the researchers in appropriate data collection.

Participants of the Study

The subject of this research is the three Mangyan tribes in the southern part of Mindoro. They called themselves the members of HAGURA, which stands for the tribes of Hanunuo, Gubatnon, and Rataganon. They are living in the vicinity of Magsaysay, San Jose, in Occidental Mindoro. This group was organized by the council of elders and formally recognized by the local government on July 15, 2021. The consolidation of the three Mangyan groups aims to:

1. Strengthen the interrelationship among the tribes.
2. Protect their ancestral domain.
3. Relive and keep hold of their traditional culture.
4. The government has recognized the need for improvement in their situation.

5. Maintain a peaceful community among the members of the three groups.

The tribes elected an elder council to represent them and advise them on how to protect and fight for their rights in protecting their indigenous lands.

The Hanunuo word signifies all pagan mountain people. Conklin (1949) also referred to them as "tawu" (the Tagalog equivalent of "tao"), the Hanunuo word for man, person, and human being. The municipalities of Mansalay, Bulalacao, and some parts of San Jose, the capital of Occidental Mindoro, govern their territory. Many accounts of the Hanunuo tribe have been written, besides those of the other Mangyan tribes. They also have their form of writing, called the Surat Mangyan. This syllabic writing system is still being taught to the young Hanunuos to preserve it.

Most of the Ratagnons live in Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro. They occupy the southernmost tip of the island province, close to the coast facing the Sulu Sea. Like the Bangon Mangyan, the Ratagnons have a unique language similar to the Cuyunon dialect spoken by the people who live on Cuyo Island in the northern part of Palawan. They also wear accessories made of beads and copper wire.

On the other hand, there needs to be more literature to account for the Gubatnon group. They are not included in the original Mangyan tribes (Iraya, Alangan, Batangan, Tadyawan, Buhid, Tao Buid, Hanunoo, and Ratagnon). They live south of the Philippines' island of Mindoro, just west of the Hanunoo Mangyan. They live in tiny villages of thatched huts in the island's interior, and a few live near towns and earn a living by making charcoal from wood. However, a few pieces of literature conclude that they came from the Hanunuo clan and are the bravest among the groups of Mangyans.

These three particular tribes are situated in the different Magsaysay, San Jose barangays in Occidental Mindoro. These groups of Indigenous people are a partner community in the community extension services of the two universities, the Divine Word College of San Jose (DWCSJ) and the Far Eastern University (FEU). The participants will comprise the indigenous community elders who are members of the Hagura organization. The identified community elders who become participants in the study are:

1. Sitio Emok, Bgy. Purnaga, Magsaysay,
2. Sitio Magarang, Bgy. Paclolo, Magsaysay
3. Sitio Malutok, Bgy. Paclolo, Magsaysay
4. Sitio Emok, Bgy. Purnaga, Magsaysay
5. Sitio Bamban, Bgy. Nicolas, Magsaysay
6. Sitio Canabang, Paclolo, Magsaysay,

The elders will be the critical informants, as they will provide specialist knowledge and have the expertise to identify the pieces of information needed in the research. They were specifically chosen to provide generalized knowledge to strengthen and support the study's claims.

Instruments Used

This study sought to generate insight from the participants' shared indigenous knowledge about their experiences as they participated in the governance practices in the community. We will focus mainly on ethnographic research's three data-gathering techniques: interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussion. A semi-structured interview to get the participants' insights will guide the data-gathering strategies. Semi-structured interviews will allow the participants to explain their answers, give examples, and describe their experiences better. The interview will emphasize the research intent of understanding how people construct meaning to produce order in their everyday lives rather than a record of what they do (Fontana & Frey, 2000). We will employ an open-ended interviewing technique, observations, field notes, anecdotal records, and document analysis as the data collection procedure to gain insight and understanding of this study. The on-site interviewing conversations will be tape-recorded with the participants' permission.

The focus group discussion will also utilize discussion focused on a particular topic. As a qualitative research method, the objective of the FGD is not to quantify but to track down all possible responses. Thus, participants in the FGD will help validate their responses. Participant observation is essential in the study for systematically recording participants' daily lives in the community. This way, cultural patterns in the area will be documented through direct observation.

Data Collection Procedure /Field Work Technique

To get the information they needed for this study, the researchers used ethnographic methods and traditional ways of gathering data, including:

1. File the requirements with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) NCR.
2. After the application is accepted, we will work with the NCIP Provincial Office in San Jose, Oriental Mindoro, to ensure the process goes smoothly.

3. Meet the staff of NCIP Occidental Mindoro for the pre-IKSP conference and orientation of the proposed study, requirements for the validation process, and agreement on the cost of the process.
4. Visit the sites to ask permission from the elders to conduct the research.
5. Prepare the research instruments needed for the study: (a) semi-structured questions; (b) interview schedules; (c) the FGD guide; (d) the field notes guide; (e) a list of documents to be reviewed and analyzed;
6. Seek the help of an expert who has lived among and written extensively about indigenous peoples, notably the Mangyan tribes, to validate the guide questions.
7. Conduct field work and collect the needed data and information.
8. Transcribe the data and field notes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The common name for these tribes was Mangyan, although they comprised eight sub-groups that differed enormously in language and culture. The distinction between tribes was defined by studies based on their speech and cultural demeanor. Unlike the other groups of Mangyan, which live in very remote mountains and valleys, the HAGURA (Hanunuo, Gubatnon, and Ratagnon) communities of Occidental Mindoro inhabit a dwelling not so far from the lowland population and have constant contact with people to trade and get a proper education. These groups live in different sitios near Magsaysay, around the municipality of San Jose Occidental, Mindoro.

Customary Structure of Leadership

The figure below best describes the Hagura structure of leadership when asked to draw their political design. The indigenous peoples give much more regard to their leadership framework than the government's authority. There is a strong manifestation that self-governance is a deeply seated part of their communal lives and is perceived by the elders of the Hanunuo, Gurangon, and Ratagnon Mangyan tribes. They describe how their indigenous political structure differs from the government-introduced concept of a governance hierarchy.

Miyamoto (1988) stated that there was no formal socio-political leader in the Hanunuo Mangyan community and that people were of the same social rank. However, this study showed that the Mangyans had local group elders whom they all respected and considered leaders. History written among them solidified the culture of visiting their community elders when the conflict between individuals became out of their hands to solve. They sought the opinion of their elders and followed their wisdom. The Hagura communities follow a similar tradition in carrying out this action.

As observed, the younger generation of hagura elders knows their age, but the older ones do not know how old they are. It is a typical reality among the more senior members of the tribes, as they do not customarily count their ages. The hagura elders were notable for their age's nonconformity regarding eldership. Florencio Liboro, a Hanunuo elder, is the youngest at forty (40) and is considered a wise older adult in the community. Manuel Yawid, known as Bapa Yawid, is the oldest of the elders and is seventy-three (73) years old. The equivalent term for an elder in the tribes' local language is Gurangon. Becoming an elder is not gender-specific in the Mangyan culture, but notably, most of the elders in the community are men.

Although there is no written evidence in the hierarchy of their political structure, to the Mangyan tribes, their gurangons are their communities' highest leaders or heads. Buendia et al. (2006) say that the unclear way the Mangyan tribes run their government showed through their respect and loyalty to their elders.

The Mangyan political structure can describe as "traditional." The Cordillera Peoples' Alliance (2012) describes traditional or self-governance as "operating in the traditional structures of consensus-based decision-making through kin-based social organizations and networks linked at varying levels, generalized reciprocity in goods and services for mutual support and cooperation, and persisting practices and rituals that sustain harmony and ethnic identity." The Hagura Mangyan has high regard for its form of leadership. It manifested itself when they illustrated the structure of their political hierarchy. Sitio leaders are composed of Mangyan leaders. Sitio leaders make decisions based on the consensus of the Hagura elders. The sitio leaders and elders of the three communities are indigenous members of their tribes.

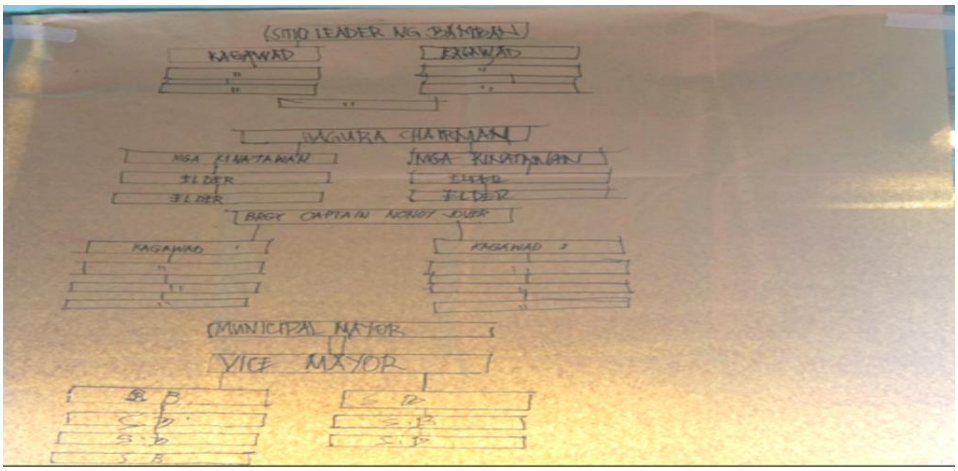


Figure 1. Political Structure of the Hagura Mangyan Leadership

Also, the three communities show how indigenous people highly value their elders, and they even have an influence on their local leaders. Leadership among the Mangyan people only sometimes implies being part of a political clan or hierarchy. Anyone can be a leader by establishing trust and confidence in the people. Almost all the hagura elders in the study became sitio leaders before being chosen as gurangons. Their leadership and service are not confined only to their clan and the general community. Their track record shows that the neighborhood respected and trusted their leadership. Tatay Artemio, Florencio Liboro, Tony Ignacio, and Toknoy Rivera served two consecutive terms (three years per term). While the oldest gurangons (in age) must clearly remember when they started to become heads in their respective places. As an example, Paeng Maravilla began in 1994 as a sitio leader. However, earlier than that, he was once a barangay tanod. Aside from being an elder for ten years, he was also the leader of the farmers' group in the barangay for several years until today. Manuel Yawid had been the very first sitio leader of the Mangyan community. His reign ended in the early 1980s, and he became an active leader of different organizations for a more significant cause for their tribe. One was the leader of Samahang Pantribu sa Kanlurang Mindoro (SAPAKAMI).

Meanwhile, Ernesto Ayagan never became a sitio leader but had very long years of experience as a sitio kagawad for nine years. He also became a barangay tanod for nine years. Distinct from the rest, Ed Liwagan from the Gubatnon tribe had no experience being a sitio leader. Choosing him as a gurangon was historical. He gained the people's trust after volunteering to be a community organizer in rebuilding their small community following a conflict between professional settlers and military personnel in their area in 1995. For eighteen years, he was the legal office's representative of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines.

The hagura communities still practice the indigenous political culture grounded on kinship and affinity as part of their political ideology. For example, Manuel Orosa Jr. portrayed his father, Manuel Orosa Sr., as an elder due to his father's advanced age and illness. Similarly, Aparito Pugoso was also replaced by his brother-in-law. Ed Liwagan had the same faith when the former gurangon of their tribe asked him to replace the old, sickly elder. Also, Florencio Liboro Jr. stepped in when his father, Florencio Liboro, Sr., a contemporary of Manuel Orosa Sr., became sickly and passed away in 2020. This scheme is the usual process by which their tribes choose a replacement for the position. It has been a long-time practice in the communities.

The communities' reliance on the respondents as leaders was also reflected in their endorsement of them to become their municipality's representatives. The Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative per municipality (IPMR) is a program under the IPRA law. Almost half of the respondents became "konsehal ng bayan" or the IPMR after serving as sitio leaders. The IPMR, under NCIP Administrative Order No. 1, series of 2009, stated guidelines for selecting indigenous representatives. The natives of the specific territory of any provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays are given the right to participate in the selection process for IPMR through their customary laws. Maintaining peace and order in their community is one of the IPMRs' mandated duties and responsibilities. The IPMR status needs to be defined in the blueprint of the indigenous political structure. It implies that they are under the jurisdiction of their local government.

"Bilang IPMR, pag may pinagawa ang barangay sa mga sitio…pag pinaikot ka, iikutin mo yun. Pag may mga problema ang sitio sa barangay, lalapit sa iyo, ikaw ang…magsasabi dun sa barangay" ("As an IPMR, the barangay designates tasks for us to follow. If the sitios of the barangay encounter problems, people will approach you about their concerns, and you have to report it to the barangay").

"Bilang IPMR, nakikipag-ugnayan din kami sa National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) na nasa San Jose para sa kapakinabangan ng mga proyektong dinadala dito sa amin" ("As an IPMR, we also interact with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in San Jose for the benefit of the projects it brings to us").

IPMR representatives, based on the law, are members of the Local Legislative Council and policy-making bodies. The representatives directly report to the barangay, local government, and NCIP. Ideally, the state has given the IPMR to the indigenous peoples for full participation and decision-making in matters they feel will affect their activities and the right to practice their indigenous leadership. In reality, respondents revealed that their duty is bound only to the particular case or concern of the community, as determined by the local government through their respective barangays. As representatives of the sitio, IPMRs are part of the barangay operation. On the other hand, the elders' scope of concern is their specific community. If the affairs of barangays need the wisdom of the council of elders, they are invited to meet and come up with resolutions.

The hagura elders' political experience is limited to what the local government has asked them to do in their communities. According to Buendia et al. (2006), this scenario is supported by several pieces of literature about the Mangyan leadership exhibiting powerlessness due to an unclear form of the political system. Furthermore, indigenous peoples only entrust their faith to their elders when making community decisions.

The Tasks of Elders in The Changing Indigenous Political Structure

For the hagura communities, the guidance of their community elders is a significant factor in sustaining order in their society. It can be noted that because of their experience as IPMRs, it became an important consideration for the communities to honor them in the highest leadership position as community elders. As gurangons, they have more responsibilities because the natives look to them for advice and trust them to solve problems in the community. This responsibility is only distinct to the elders of the community. This obligation was separate from their job as IMPRs, where the government used them as community leaders.

Becoming arbitrators and giving solutions to internal and external conflicts is one of the distinct tasks of the hagura elders. Mild cases in the communities of the three tribes are first settled among themselves by the concerned parties. If they disagree, they will bring the problem to the sitio leaders. Part of the mandate of the sitio leaders is to conciliate the conflict between the members. When the conflict becomes unmanageable, they refer the discord to the attention of the gurangons. Moreover, it is worth noting that the duties of the gurangons are not restricted only to their own community's issues. They are also getting invitations to settle disputes among neighboring indigenous communities.

During the discussion, the elders mentioned holding regular meetings as a part of their leadership tradition. They usually meet at the "Bahay Tirigsunan" to discuss community concerns and issues. Regular meetings are essential to them because they become updated on the affairs of the three tribes and can exchange wisdom and share reflections, experiences, and views on resolving conflicts that affect their livelihood and communal affairs.

The primary concern the elders of the three communities administer is the dispute over the presence of the damuong (Tagalog people) in their territorial domain. Respondents generally call the Tagalog people and other settlers "damuong" or "tiga-baba" to separate them or to distinguish their identity from theirs. Gurangon Tony Ignacio lamented how these strangers are always part of dealing with problems in their community."Nakapaloob palagi sa usaping lupain ang mga tagalog. Hindi naman namin sila pinapaalis. Pero sila ay nasa loob ng lupaing ninuno" ("The damuongs are always tied up with our struggle to the ancestral land. We do not ask them to leave, but they are inside our ancestral domain"). Paeng Maravilla added, "ang aming lupain ay pinasok na ng mga tiga-baba" ("The lowlanders already invade our land").

Since the beginning of time, the Mangyan tribes and the lowlanders of Mindoro have been at odds. It was an enduring effect of how Mangyan people were discriminated against and victimized by the damuong through unfair labor contracts, ulterior debts, and successfully displacing them from their native lands. Damuongs are their offenders these days, according to the Mangyan elders.

Nevertheless, unlike their ancestors' retreat and flee behavior in solving conflicts with the Tagalogs. Even Visayans, the present-day Mangyan communities, through the wisdom of their elders, have learned how to confront their complicated relationship with the lowlanders bravely. "Kailangang malaman at igalang ang side ng bawat isa," Gurangon Tony emphasized. "Dapat may pag-uusap" ("It is important to respect each other. There should be a dialogue"). "The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) protects and empowers us as indigenous peoples."Kaya hindi dapat mawalan ng lupain ang mga katutubo" ("Part of the mandate of IPRA is to protect and take care of our ancestral domain. We do not want to lose our lands"), Gurangon Toknoy added.

In the old days, elders could not meddle in disputes between their people and the lowlanders about land claims. The reason must be more knowledge of asserting their rights to their ancestral land. However, the indigenous peoples' rights declaration came to life with growing international concern about protecting this vulnerable sector of society in recent years. The 1987 constitution established indigenous communities' rights to their ancestral lands in the Philippines. The passage of IPRA

legislation and the establishment of NCIP cemented the use of legal and policy instruments to protect intellectual property rights to ancestral domains.

Sadly, the reality is that many of the indigenous peoples, including their community leaders, still need to gain adequate knowledge about their rights as stated in the state laws. The study revealed that they need help expressing and explaining terms referring to laws, ordinances, and some political terms relating to indigenous rights. Some switched terms into their native language to express what they meant. Ed Liwagan, among the hagura elders, had the most extensive political experience due to his long experience as an indigenous representative in the legal office. He professed that some indigenous leaders must learn their duty and function in the indigenous political system. Some elders need to understand what the IPRA law states fully. "Kaya dapat, bigyan pa ng malay o kamalayan ang ibang mga leader namin, para ibig sabihin, alam nila ang gawain nila pagdating sa komunidad" ("It is critical that indigenous elders be properly educated so that we know what to do in the community"). Likewise, Aparito Pugoso suggested strengthening the knowledge of the communities about the IPRA law and implementing it accordingly. They pointed out that there are specific laws to follow, including the guide on defending their ancestral land from outsiders such as the damuongs. Chapter 8 of the IPRA law outlines guiding principles for identifying and delineating IP ancestral domains.

In general, the respondents acknowledged that their experience as sitio leaders and IPMRs helped them understand the concept of land and territories, which are vital to their collective identity. Even though they tried to settle land disputes, especially with outsiders, their own people turned against them."Minsan, kaming mga gurangon ay napapagbintangan din ng mga tiga "taas" (tribe) na asset ng mga tiga "baba" (damuong) pagdating sa pag-uusap tungkol sa lupa" ("Some members of our communities even accused us of helping the lowlanders when it comes to land disputes"), Gurangon Ed lamented. For the elders, fighting over ancestral land is a collective responsibility, not just a personal conflict. For Bapa Mauel Yawid. "Ito ay lupain na minana namin sa aming ninuno. Sa samahan iyan. Kaya dapat buong pamayanan ang magreresolba" ("This land was a gift from our ancestors. This belongs to us. It must be resolved by the community"). The tribes' experience has shown that even if the dispute with the Tagalogs is settled in the barangay, the "Christians" (Tagalogs) will commit the same offense. The community never gets discouraged from filing complaints against them. "Hindi kami titigil. Para magkaroon ng parusa iyong mga tiga-baba". ("We will not cease to pursue our rights. The lowlanders must face the consequence").

Notably, the land dispute is not only a controversy between them and the damuongs. This dispute is also of legitimate interest within sthe hagura communities. To the hagura elders, this issue is crucial because of their attachment to their ancestral lands, and it is part of their long-time struggle for self-determination. Kinship feuds over their properties are common among them. The most pronounced internal issues are the selling and pawning of land by the members of the communities. However, this controversy is not unique to the Mangyan communities. Some other IPs in the country have a similar condition. For instance, in Mindanao, the Mansaka tribe sold their lands for a low price (Buendia et al., 2006).

In 2010, the hagura communities, under the late president Benigno Aquino Jr., were awarded the certificate of the ancestral domain title (CADT) through the mutual assistance of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who processed the claims (Doyo, 2021). The IPRA Law (http://ncipcar.ph/images/pdfs/IPRA.pdf, n.d.) defines the ancestral domain as "a title formally recognizing the rights of possession and ownership of ICCs/IPs over their ancestral domains identified and delineated under this law" (p. 3).

This was correlated with the narratives of the respondents about the portions of land that were distributed to the communities. It was on December 15, 2010, when the late president Benigno Aquino Jr. awarded the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) to the communities of Hanunuo, Gubatnon and Ratagnon. However, certain policies are attached to the allocation of land. Ed Liwagan recounted, "May mga polisiyang nakapaloob sa lupa. Sa loob ng isa o dalawang taon ay dapat makultiba mo ito. Kung hindi, ang binigyan ng lupa ay mawawalan ng karapatan dito at paalisin. Wala na siyang babalikang lupa. Ibibigay ito sa ibang nangangailangan dahil di pinaunlad ng naunang pinagbigyan" ("There were policies attached to the awarding of lands. It must have been in production for one or two years. If not, then the right to that piece of land is transferred to another person because the previous owner did not cultivate the land"). "Ang nagiging usapin sa tribo ay naiibenta at naiisangla ang lupa," Tony Ignacio added."Kaya bawat assembly ay ipinapaliwanag na bawal o hindi ito puwede" ("The issue with the tribes is that members sell or pawn their lands. We always explain during assemblies that those are prohibited by the IPRA law").

Another common problem the elders resolve in their respective communities is a family dispute. As unresolved cases arise between families, family disputes cause disorder, resulting in a reluctance to cooperate with the people involved in the community. In this kind of conflict, giving solutions is one of the major tasks of the hagura elders. Creating agreements on what is and is not an acceptable pattern of behavior among members of the opposing parties is part of how they interact with others. These norms are part of their devised law system, also known as their customary laws. According to the definition of IPRA, "customary law" is "a body of written and unwritten rules, usages, customs, and practices that have been traditionally and continually recognized, accepted, and observed by respective ICCs and IPs" (p. 3).

The Inner Voices of the Changing Times: The Journey of the Mangyan Elders in Governance Practices

The Mangyan customary law is integrated and manifested in the hagura value and belief system. Manifested among the hagura elders is their appreciation of their traditional oral customary laws. As much as possible, they would like to maintain peace and harmony when dealing with conflicts among family members and clans. They typically investigate problems based on the previously created context. The elders allow the aggressor to choose where the trial will be held. They often asked the accused, "ayos ng tribo o ayos ng baba?" (Tribe settlement or barangay settlement?). "Ayos ng tribo" means the community's elders will meddle and determine the proper resolution to the dispute. If the accused chooses "Ayos ng baba," the case will be filed with the office of the sitio leader to process the disagreement.

The discussion revealed that elders have different approaches to settling problems. Based on the experience of Gurangon Paeng Maravilla, a Hanunuo elder, if families are involved in the conflict, they may want to avoid seeing each other eye-to-eye. He will personally visit the two ailing parties separately and explore the veracity of the disagreement. He will advise them to meet with him to discuss the problem. He assures both sides that he will initiate the discussion to resolve the dispute. Primarily, both parties will write a letter stating their concerns before a confrontation is set. Generally, this approach is the elders' most common strategy for solving community conflicts.

Aparito Pugoso of the Ratagnon tribe used an unconventional method to solve problems in his community. According to him, five members are in the council of elders in their settlement. He was chosen as the chief elder. When there is a conflict among the community members, He assigns the four elders to be the "attorneys" or defenders of the ailing parties. They will present evidence to support each side's position. "Tinitingnan, tinitimbang ko ang katwiran ng magkabilang panig base sa pahayag ng kani-kanilang tagapagtanggol" (“I make sure to see all sides and weigh the gravity of the offense based on their defenders' narratives”), he explained.

Although elders differ in their techniques to settle misunderstandings, the community still has confidence in their elders' judgment abilities to serve as mediators. A mediator in the Mangyan customary tradition does not equate to being a "judge" or "prosecutor" who gives a verdict based on his judgment. Being a mediator as part of their customary law allows the elders to guide the opposing parties to discuss the problem until they agree to settle it. As Ed Liwagan stressed, "Wala po tayong pinapanigan, kundi tumitingin po tayo sa kanilang katwiran" (“We are not in favor of or against anyone. We only examine their arguments”). They called this the "hatol ng tribo ." The elders agreed that they should listen to the stories of both sides before coming to a decision. Their judgment served as the decision of the whole community.

In settling disputes, the three communities shared the same beliefs and values, which, according to them, were part of the customary law created by their forefathers. The communities have identified a meeting place they called "Bahay-tirigsunan" to hold the hearings of the civil cases brought to their attention. Oral negotiations are the only way for the Mangyan communities to resolve misunderstandings. Elders mediate to come to a compromise, which is one of Mangyan society's principal values.

Every offense has a corresponding resolution. Commonly, elders can settle disputes by suggesting ways to compromise, which both parties will discuss and acknowledge. Part of the negotiation is reasonable compensation for the offended party. "Pinagdedesisyunan naming mga gurangon kung kakayanin ba ng nagkasala ang kanyang kaparusahan" (“as elders, we decide whether the offenders will be capable of the punishment”), Tony Ignacio pronounced as part of their decision-making.

The hagura elders emphasized that what they asked of the offenders was not punishment, but rather a request for the transgressors to complete as a sign of repentance and to reach an amicable settlement. The compensation depends on the weight of the offense committed. It is also based on how many people are offended or victimized by the perpetrators. Florencio Liboro illustrated how settlement works in the community. "Kung ano ang mapagkasunduan ng halaga ng pagkakasala. Halimbawa, sabihin naming limampung kilong bigas at limampung kilong baboy para sa halaga ng pagkakasala. Pagkakasunduan ito ng dalawang panig." "Kung ilang katutubo ang kinakaharap ng nagkasala, paghahati-hati nila ito bilang kabayaran sa kanila"(“Whatever will be decided as payment for the offense. For example, it could be 50 kilos of meat or 50 kilos of rice. Both sides will have to agree about it. Anyone involved in the case will be given a fair share”), Tony Ignacio added.

Assume that, like the slaughtering of an animal, the proposed settlement is unsuccessful during the first meeting of the two ailing parties. In that case, the elders will schedule a second session for resolution. They will request the presence of the other hagura elders, seeking help to sort out the conflict. If the rivals do not compromise, the last recourse is to bring the dispute to the sitio leader. Even if the case is brought to the attention of the local barangay leaders, it is an experience they are still requested to join and hear the exchange of arguments. They are also asked to propose practical advice to settle the differences between the rivals. The hagura elders must strengthen peace and harmony in their communities and establish a civil relationship with the damuongs living in their ancestral domain.

As time passed, the elders admitted that they had decreasing influence over the community regarding economic and political decision-making rooted in their customary ideology. They observed that the members gradually undermined their active participation in the political affairs of the community. Unlike the Mandaya indigenous peoples in Davao, where the government

system has little effect on their customary practices (Domingo, 2004), the state-dominated system significantly affects the indigenous leadership of the Mangyan elders. Artemio Inano, for instance, noticed that in Sitio Bamban, people no longer rely on elders' wisdom in managing conflicts. "Kung ano ang napagdesisyunan ng mga sitio lider, yun na lang. Hindi na dinadaan sa mga gurangon" ("Whatever is decided by the sitio leaders, so be it. They will not consult the elders anymore"). He further disclosed that their voice was outnumbered even in decision-making by the local leaders in the sitio. This situation made him decide to lay low from his position as gurangon of Sitio Bamban.

Literature established that Mangyan elders had both internal and external influence in the past. It is multifaceted. They were the most trustworthy to listen, mediate, and settle disputes in the community and with the neighboring tribes. Even though most hagura elders believed that their values and traditional knowledge were gradually becoming obsolete in modern times, they were not alone. When asked if they are still consulted about sitio matters, Ernesto Ayagan quickly responded, "Bihira na. Kasi may nanunungkulan din sa sitio. Pag di nila kaya (ang problema), pumupunta sila dun. Andito lang ako. Puwede ring magtanong kung kailangan" ("This is extremely uncommon because there are also sitio leaders. If the members cannot settle their own disputes, they will go to the sitio leaders. I am just here. They can approach me anytime").

State Imposition and Its Effect on The Elders' Leadership in The Community

Formal versus the traditional system of leadership

Surprisingly, the Hagura elders have a favorable view of applying state law to their traditional system of governance. Integrating the hagura council of elders into the organizational structure of their respective barangay local government unit is a development. They see this progress as a way for community elders to showcase their wisdom and practice their indigenous knowledge in leadership rather than as a way to compete with state law. The national government's plan also considered their pride in their native culture and the freedom to follow their laws.

The hagura elders demonstrated their acceptance of the government's authority over their indigenous governance practices. They acknowledged the convergence of the formal system of governance with their indigenous system because it promotes harmonious relationships among indigenous peoples and the lowlanders living together in the community. The council of elders and the sitio officials work together to help settle conflicts peacefully. This picture keeps cases from worsening and sending more people to the municipal office.

The hagura elders respect the authority of the barangay leaders and the sitio leaders. They are amenable and accept the reality that they also need the support of formal leaders. Their duty and responsibility as community elders in the present condition are more systematic, as they are under what is stated in the IPRA law. "Ang pagkilos namin bilang gurangon ay naaayon sa batas IPRA," Tony Ignacio said. "Hangga't walang isinasangguni sa amin ay ayaw naming pakialaman ang kanilang karapatang-sibil sa pamayanan" ("We act in accordance with the IPRA laws. Until members of the community approach us to ask for our help, we do not interfere with their civil rights").

However, like the other IPs in the country, the hagura elders did not deny that the Mangyan communities are also experiencing conflicts between implementing their customary law and state law. For one, there is no fixed tenure of leadership in indigenous governance. Hagura elders are only replaced if they voluntarily retire due to old age, sickness, or personal or family matters that could interfere with their service to the community. This Practice is contrary to the state system of governance, where the sitio leaders (composed of Mangyan leaders) are replaced after their term of office and can only still serve if the people approve of electing them to rule over the community.

Also revealed in the interview is how the assimilation of the formal leadership structure affected the local kin system and paved the way for a conflict in indigenous political culture. Traditionally, the members of the community are the ones who choose their leaders. However, recently, the barangay chairman appointed the new sitio leader among the Hanunuo group in Sitio Canabang, Barangay Paclolo, without consultation with the elders or the members. The barangay chairs of the barangays where the hagura communities live are all non-indigenous. However, the sitio leaders among the indigenous communities are also IPs. It was acceptable in their culture.

In a strange twist, the person who took over was not a member of the leader's family or related to them by blood. As narrated by Gurangon Tony Ignacio, the people elected the former leader. "Dapat ay nagbotohan dahil tradisyon iyon sa amin na kami ang mamimili ng aming pinuno" ("There should be an election because that is part of our tradition"), he exclaimed. This instance of meddling by the barangay captain is a manifestation of the powerful dynamism of the formal leaders rather than the elected indigenous representatives of the sitio. It is also an indication that some local government politics, in one way or another, challenge the traditional political system of the Hagura communities. The IPRA clearly states that the government recognizes the inherent right of IPs to self-governance (Chapter IV, Section 13) and actualizes matters relating to their internal and local affairs. Interference in their political affairs is a blatant indication that, despite remaining in place, their traditional leadership structure is gradually deteriorating due to these circumstances.

The Inner Voices of the Changing Times: The Journey of the Mangyan Elders in Governance Practices

Participation and Decision-Making

The hagura elders commonly adhere to inclusive, participatory, and consensus decision-making on meeting conflict resolutions. However, because of modern-day conflicts, particularly with outsiders, the elders only have limited knowledge of how to compromise the issues. Hence, traditional legal systems can no longer deal with and resolve internal conflicts. As a result, the elders have only one option, to let the community members choose where they want to seek assistance. Most members chose to settle the conflict through the barangay. This situation also caused conflict with their customary laws, which are no longer used. Moreover, the elders feared that the young generation of indigenous leaders would soon forget their traditional judiciary system. "Kaya po madalang na ang nag-papaayos ng problema sa tribo dahil may kabigatan din po ang parusa. Laging may katapat na kabayaran ang nagawang pagkakamali. Kung sa baba, pasensya lang. Sorry lang. Kamayan lang. Huwag na lang uulitin" ("There is little settlement in the tribe due to the harsh punishment. There is always compensation for every mistake committed. Unlike when bringing the case to the sitio leaders, shaking hands and apologizing is enough, with the promise not to do it again").

Furthermore, the elders agreed that their community has a distinct method of resolving disputes that differs from the application of modern judicial laws. To them, the customary system of law is a gift that they inherited from their great ancestors, enabling them to exercise their wisdom to rule and govern. Gurangon Florencio argued, "Yung sa tradisyunal, walang pwedeng magsinungaling. Eh, sa batas natin ngayon, kung walang testigos, pwede ako magsinungaling.Ay pano yung totoo? Talo pa rin sya. Para sa aming mga gurangon, mas maganda kasi hindi ka pwede magsinungaling. Hindi mo na kailangan yung tulong ng iba kasi. Ay sa batas natin ngayon, kahit ako magsinungaling basta ako'y may testigos, pwede kong patunayan kahit yung hindi totoo" ("According to our traditional laws, you cannot change the truth. In our judicial system now, you can easily tell a lie, especially if you have no witness. We would like our customary laws because you do not need the help of others because you are telling the truth. Unlike under the rule of law, where you can be acquitted even if you are lying, provided that you have witnesses to defend you").

The gurangons further hoped they could still preserve their customary laws because, according to them, this is the core of their identity as a group. To them, customary laws and their continued Practice of them in their settlement are vital elements in the preservation of their indigenous knowledge and their existence. They assumed that as elders of their respective communities, it was their great responsibility to ensure that it was handed down to the next generation of elders.

Unregulated Forest Resource Utilization

The elders agreed with the state laws concerning the protection of natural resources. However, while its primary goal is to guard and preserve the earth's resources, it also raised concern for IPs. Hagura elders indicated an adverse reaction to the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR) implementing rules and regulations. Executive Order Number 277, Section 68 requires legal documents or licenses on the cutting, gathering, and collecting of timber or other forest products. ("Executive Order No. 277, S. 1987 | GOVPH," 1987). They are dependent on their lands. To the Mangyan elders, they nurtured the land and the forest for generations because it reflects their existence. While the agency must implement the law, they asked the government to give them leniency over this matter since they considered the forest their traditional living space. Centuries ago, they used logs for housing, firewood, and other personal uses. "We only get what we need. We also follow the DENR mandate to plant and replace our cut trees. Still, we are getting arrested and punished."

They were also aware of strangers exploiting their forest and other natural resources. "We are the true defender of nature." Gurangon Totong exclaimed. They agree that they ensure that they have indigenous forest management, which was transferred to them by their forefathers. They guarantee to protect their territories by planting trees to maintain a growing natural forest protection.

Additionally, shifting cultivation is still evident among Hagura Indigenous peoples. Due to restrictive state policies, the most common traditional livelihood practice has come under increasing pressure from the Hagura leaders. Many years ago, the government devised policies and laws to eliminate shifting cultivation, deeming it inefficient and harmful to the ecosystem. They were concerned that continuing their traditional way of life would force them to cultivate the available land intensively, limiting their output. According to the government, shifting cultivation contributes to forest degradation, damages water sources, and causes the earth's rising temperature. However, no concrete evidence or at least a very minimal effect is shown among recent studies about traditional land cultivation.

Younger gurangons, on the other hand, demonstrated a welcoming concept of modern land cultivation. For instance, Gurangon Ed concluded that the Gubatnon community was already acculturated to modernized farming. Through the Department of Agriculture, the government supports them with different equipment for better farming. However, Gurangon Florencio of the Hanunuo tribe disputed this idea, asserting that swidden farming is a traditional sacred practice part of the Mangyan indigenous peoples' culture. Bapa Yawid, the oldest among the elders, supported that "kaingin" (slash and burn) was a foundation for the adaptive system of their past generation.

The Hagura elders further unanimously agreed that the IPRA law respects and acknowledges their customary laws as well as their rights as indigenous people. But even with the existence of the law, they still believed that the law did not guarantee legal security for the recognition of their lands and territories. According to Gurangon Artemio, "Nakapaloob naman po ito sa IPRA. Sana ang DENR ay igalang nila ang aming kulturang paghahanap-buhay, kagaya ng pagkakaingin, dahil iyon po ay kulturang katutubo. At pag binago nila ang batas, at tuluyang ipinagbawal ang pagkakaingin at pagputol ng mga puno, ay apektado naman po ang aming hanap-buhay" ("This is stated in the IPRA law. We hope the DENR will respect our farming system because this is part of our culture. If they change the law and eventually prohibit us from cutting down trees, it will have an impact on our subsistence").

The results of the interviews with the hagura Mangyan elders strongly imply that the indigenous governance system is not manipulated by one institution of authority in the community. The role of leaders, like the indigenous elders, is vital in working together to safeguard the interest of the majority. Finally, this study obtained evidence of the extensive roles of the indigenous elders in their respective communities because of their wisdom, philosophy on life, cultural knowledge, ceremonies, and gifts that they have acquired and nurtured over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the study strongly implies that Mangyan leadership, as testified by the three of its subtribes, most often resides with the community elders because of their time-tested indigenous knowledge and experience with customary laws. The concept of the elder is complex and inseparably linked to critical issues such as leadership, knowledge, and history in the Mangyan communities. Mangyan indigenous people associate elder leadership with family ties, history, strength, experiences, and the survival of their race. "Elder" is a politically volatile concept that includes implicit and explicit ideas about authority, power, authenticity, and political correctness. It is a highly contested construct that advocates the relevance of the indigenous elders.

Highlighted in the study are the three key findings. First, the Hagura Mangyan communities have their political structure. It is not a formal leadership system, as claimed by previous studies, but it has the fundamental components of their respected elders. Even with the interference of government governance, they assert and maintain their traditional leadership structure. This assertion affirms that their long-established leadership system is vital to the indigenous communities' efforts to preserve and maintain indigenous knowledge for the generations after them. This revelation only confirms that their exclusive leadership practices and customary legal systems are distinct from the Mangyan leadership's.

In recent years, communities have adopted the barangay system as a political unit, resulting in a deranged and confused indigenous political structure. However, the result of the study proved the stance of the Mangyan communities, asserting their position as being on top of the political structure, prioritizing their indigenous form of governance and leadership. It is with no doubt that even though indigenous communities nowadays live within the government systems with formalized leadership structures, the Mangyan social and cultural everyday living is still under the influence of their traditional leadership practice.

Second, the hybrid government-indigenous leadership and governance could be more problematic for the Mangyan communities, creating tensions and conflicts with the indigenous leadership practices. The finding expedites this idea that the Mangyan customary law practices are gradually collapsing from the perspective of the indigenous elders. The Mangyan tribes have good laws, and those who answered the survey repeatedly said they wanted to return to those traditions.

The elders acknowledged that the formal government law recognizes their customary laws and legal systems because it is stated in the IPRA law as proof of their protection. However, it can still be inferred from the discussion that the indigenous leadership experiences denial of their customary rights, dissatisfaction with the implementation of the laws, and policy neglect of the state policies. Integrating the government's political system into the traditional political system of the Mangyan communities brings political marginalization. This kind of system highlights the marginalization of indigenous elders rather than intensifying it.

Discovery of an intriguing limitation of this study during the interaction with the respondents is the possibility of the Mangyan indigenous elders' need for knowledge and complete understanding of the laws containing constitutional safeguards in protecting their customary rights and traditions. Even though the research cannot fully prove this "lacking" component in the indigenous leadership of the Mangyan elders because there was insufficient information, it seems like it would be suitable for future research to look into this.

Given this observation, this study suggests a potential intervention of government service agencies, especially the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and other related agencies, to increase the knowledge capacity of the Mangyan elders and leaders about the IPRA law in a manner that will suit their level of understanding. Arming the council of elders with knowledge will give them the confidence to speak on behalf of the members and make informed decisions. They can also help the government make important decisions, like creating and carrying out laws.

Lastly, as the customary law practices of the hagura communities are slowly eroding, the elder leadership is also weakening due to the imposition of the government's political system. Indigenous elders believe customary law practices are suitable methods to resolve intercommunity conflicts while maintaining respect and harmonious relationships among the members. So, knowing how the Philippine Constitution recognizes and protects the Mangyan customary legal system, such as their rights over territories and natural resources, is crucial.

In conclusion, the result of the study demonstrated that the government's imposition of decisions on their indigenous homelands and territories without their consent has a demoralizing effect on their political, social, and cultural integrity as leaders. Moreover, with the hybrid political structure, disputes within the communities regarding family and personal matters increasingly refer to the barangay arbitration system rather than seeking the advice of the indigenous elders. Therefore, indigenous elders perceived that their customary law systems were already obsolete and irrelevant to the present time. To the researchers, this condition of negligence toward the wisdom and knowledge of the Mangyan indigenous elders will eventually lead to the impartiality of the community members to their customary law practices.

It is, therefore, imperative to maintain and support indigenous elders' leadership skills to inspire budding indigenous leaders in the communities. The state's negligence in promoting security to the indigenous political power may result in political isolation. Moreover, the lack of political participation among the indigenous elders may make them withdraw and be indifferent to the government system, resulting in more complicated conflicts.

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