

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOWARDS POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AMONG BUKIDNON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Among the Central Mindanao University's (CMU) mission is to provide equitable access to quality instruction, research extension and production for economic prosperity, moral integrity social and cultural sensitivity and environmental consciousness. One of its extension initiatives which is the "CMU USWAG TA (Let us Progress) Program" dealt with a situational analysis on the training needs of the indigenous peoples (IPs) in Geographically Isolated and Deprived Areas (GIDAs) areas in Bukidnon, Philippines and designed research and development interventions. Posting and Community assemblies were done as required by the NCIP for Certificate of Compliance issuance. Through FGD, interviews, and problem tree analysis, it was found that there is a need to address the communities' cultural degradation and lack of livelihood skills and opportunities. There is diminishing interest of their young people to perform their cultural practices, to speak their own language and to observe their customary laws. They also lack farming skills and livelihood opportunities.*

*Following Input-Process-Output Design, two RDE programs were proposed and were approved by CMU BOR. CMU has a coffee laboratory, nursery and demo farm as learning sites. It has faculty experts and strong local and international linkages. One program, "Capability Building Program for Indigenous Coffee Growers in Bukidnon," is supported by the Agricultural Cooperative Development International and the Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (ACDI-VOCA) and Philippine Coffee Advancement and Farm Enterprise (PhilCAFE). The other is supported by CHED in cooperation with Philippine Canada Education Consortium (PhilCanEduCon/Magic 7+) and the University of Saskatchewan in Canada. This is on "Social Enterprise Engagement Towards Cultural Restoration, Poverty Alleviation, Food Security and Quality Education for IPs in Bukidnon.*

*The program's sustainability strategies and impact pathways are geared towards achieving the SDGs on No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Quality and Inclusive Education, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.*

**Keywords:** cultural restoration; indigenous peoples, PhilCAFE, poverty alleviation, inclusive education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Central Mindanao University's mission to establish sustainable human and environmental conditions can be realized through a social engagement which would address its constituents' needs, problems and training and livelihood priorities. These engagements are done in response to the government's call for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS). These are also carried out by faculty members, who are experts in their fields, in order for communities to apply their knowledge and skills to elevate their living conditions, social and environmental safety and community involvement. However, an in-depth and contextualized situational analysis is very much wanting in these activities. Monitoring strategies and impact pathways relating to these activities may become problematic when counterfactual variables influence the expected outcomes. Based on these observations, the extension office personnel endeavored a great deal in approaching extension activities through a holistic approach where situational analysis is collaboratively carried out by the faculty members, LGUs and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs). This approach entailed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), interviews, participant observations, and journaling which eventually revealed the felt needs of the communities and thus, became the accurate bases of the training designs. The result of the situational analysis, which involved stakeholder analysis, problem analysis, objective analysis, and project selection, were useful in designing intervention strategies relating literacy/education, health, and other social engagements.

The proposed interventions will be based on the results of the situational analysis will eventually enhance trainees' knowledge, skills and attitude which shall be translated into

high yield, increased income, decent living, cultural survival and strong, healthy and sustainable communities.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The project is descriptive in nature. Being participatory it involved the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Office, LGUS, IPOs and key informants involved in the milestones that included MOA presentation, discussion, and signing with LGUs. Posting and Community Consultative Assembly in coordination with the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) were also done and these involved site visits and rituals in four barangays, namely: Panalsalan, Maramag, Bukidnon, Lumbayao, Valencia City, Songco, Lantapan, Bukidnon, and Dalwangan, Malaybalay City. The situational analysis or a survey to identify the needs/problems of the barangays through leg working, and coordination meetings were also done. Problems bared by 40 key informants were categorized according to themes to come up with the dominant cases among the four ancestral domains. Problems and objective analysis were then presented as bases of the design and development of the intervention strategies. The proposed interventions were presented during the University Proposal Presentation for evaluation by the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs). The instruments of process and sustainability/impact evaluation of the intervention projects were formulated, discussed and evaluated by SMEs during a seminar workshop in the University Extension office. The proposals were revised according to the comments and evaluation of the SMEs and were presented to partner agencies for possible funding. The Situational Analysis aimed at analyzing the situation of the cultural communities in terms of their livelihood-

training and literacy/education needs; and ascertaining the intervention programs and project priorities which may constitute a social enterprise engagement which will address poverty and illiteracy.

The situational analysis revealed some common concerns about cultural restoration, livelihood opportunities, and farming competencies among the IP-respondents from the involved ancestral domains, Bukidnon.

### **Review of Literature**

Sustainable goals in the Philippines are addressed to all citizens of the Philippines including our Indigenous Peoples (IPs) which are usually located in Geographically Isolated and Depressed Areas (GIDAS) [1]. However, information on their specific needs require a thorough analysis in order to provide the appropriate intervention. Being an aspiring research university, CMU dedicates its mission to sustainable development of the neighboring communities especially the IPs which surround the university premises. In the discussion below, the situation of IPs in the Philippines, sustainable goals, and community engagement strategies as interventions are thoroughly outlined.

#### **On Indigenous Peoples**

The most comprehensive international standard on the rights of indigenous peoples so far is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) provides that, among others, indigenous peoples have the right, without any discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social condition [2]. In fact, according to the 2009 State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, "indigenous peoples are found to experience disability and reduced quality of life [2]. A case in point, over 60 per cent of the 14 – 17 million indigenous people in the Philippines live in Mindanao, and when health, education and infrastructure investments were planned they were often the lowest priority [3].

While school is supposedly the best place for the IP students, it also becomes the venue of discrimination, the place where they feel as "non-being," and an immersion of a surface culture [4]. There are two kinds of discrimination, from the education itself and from the people. There were some reports about teacher treating IP students differently and classmates who also mimics the general discriminatory views of the society [4]. Further, the wearing of school uniforms and school shoes which is beyond the financial capacity of the students. Not wearing of shoes becomes their mark and is also a source for them to be discriminated. They are also labeled as slow learners just because they have to take time to understand and learn the competencies required of them. Their way of life is seen as backward and ancient, their skills and knowledge backwards, thus seen as unnecessary. They were usually misrepresented and misinterpreted because of the prevailing prejudices. When discussion about them is included, it is usually about their things e.g. clothes, songs, etc. These result to a shallow understanding of the IP's identity being limited to blood affiliation instead of including the cultural heritage and history of the community.

A curriculum designed for the IP students can be beneficial not only in providing them literacy but also in restoring their self-worth and identity. There are already initiatives on these such as that of the DepEd's National Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), Asian Council for People's Culture (ACPC) which came up with the SIKAT (Schools

for Indigenous Knowledge and Traditions) Program, University of SouthEastern Philippines' (USEP) *Pamulaan* Center for Indigenous People's Education, and *Apu Palamguwan* Cultural Education Center (APC) in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon.

The Department of Education (DepEd) adopted the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework which enunciates "guidance to schools and other education programs as they engage with indigenous communities in contextualizing the K to 12 Curriculum" (Republic of the Philippines Department of Education, 2015, paragraph 1). This DepEd order, which is the result of numerous consultations with elders, leaders, and initiators of community-based indigenous learning, recognizes the right that indigenous peoples have for a culturally sensitive and responsive education (Republic of the Philippines Department of Education, 2015) [5].

The IPEd curriculum framework takes off from the ethics of "inclusion, participation, and empowerment as provided by DepEd's IPEd [National Indigenous Peoples Education] Policy Framework...and is consistent with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which specify the right of IPs to 'establish and control their educational systems and institutions'" (Republic of the Philippines Department of Education, 2015, paragraph 7). Luyungan IP School in Nasuli, Bangcud, Malaybalay City is one of the IP boarding schools under the Department of Education and it has 240 students.

Similarly, the *Pamulaan* Center for Indigenous People's Education, initially highlighted education "rooted to the life and culture" which first courses offered were traditional ones like education, agriculture, and anthropology. There are also classes for elementary and high school students, with curricula based on "cultural background and contexts." IP communities were also taught the basics of plant cultivation and selling agricultural products (social enterprise), peace-building and multi-cultural studies. *Pamulaan* Center is a partner of University of South Eastern Philippines (USEP) in Mintal, Davao City [6]. The institution is driven into creating a right cultural and pertinent pathways in training and formation for the indigenous children, youth, community leaders, and development leaders. Its graduates are supposed to be armed with knowledge and abilities to start up collective actions for sustainable development of the IP communities. The school offers Early Childhood Development Program, Elementary and High School Program, Tertiary education, Capability Building and Skills Training, Local Educators Advancement Program, IP-LED, The Living Heritage of Philippine Indigenous People, and Community Service – Learning and Volunteer Program.

Another is the initiative in Bendum which began because the community recognized a need: a school for their children in Bendum, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. This was led by *Datu* Nestor Menaling which has then turned into an Indigenous People's community school offering a basic education program and integrating community and cultural knowledge and was officially called as *Apu Palamguwan* Cultural Education Center (APC) [7]. Here, education is seen as an investment that is truthful and steady to a culture and its way of life and approach to learning a sustainable life. Significantly, its education is deeply installed in the

ancestral domain, gathering together the values and knowledge which could be useful as a setting for education for the next generation.

APC takes the culture-based approach to education [7]. The focus is on ensuring that the life and culture of the people is the central learning experience for its students. This approach is inclusive of the goals of MLE, but goes beyond the basics in terms of culture. Culture based education recognizes the importance of integrating the community’s knowledge system and way of life in the school curriculum to sustain the culture and tradition of the *Pulangiyen* and other cultural groups in the area. This approach allows children to be supported in their learning by their parents, other members of the community, and by their surroundings. Because the culture is used as content, lesson plans incorporate the reality of community life and tackle topics such as land productivity, trade and livelihood, and employment opportunities. Cultural traditions are also integrated into lesson plans, which allow students to develop an understanding and appreciation of the community’s practices.

**Sustainable Development Goals**

Even with the increase of economic growth, there is still a high percentage of Filipinos who believe that they are poor. In the 2019 report of the Social Weather Station, it is revealed that there is still a prevailing moderate hunger in the country. In Mindanao, although moderate hunger fell by 1.6% and severe hunger by 0.5 points, the problem is still present [8].

It is in this context that the United Nations action in eradicating poverty has 17 agenda for sustainable development wherein all countries and stakeholders acting in collaborative plan will implement. The Philippines is one of the 22 countries that will lead the national review and report about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) from the UN Sustainable Development Summit [9]. This High Level Political Forum (HLPF) [10] is the body mandated to oversee the implementation of the agenda and was created by the UN General Assembly. This promise of the Philippines has enough reason to be delivered since the new presidency is responsible why development still remains as an aspiration after a succession of different presidents.

Among the agenda for sustainable development which is addressed by this study include: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities to all; Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all [United Nations SDGs 2016] [3].

**Community Engagement**

The sustainable goals could only be successful when people engage in the projects intended for their development. Thus, it is important that the concept of community engagement can be related to achieving the SDGs among the IP communities in Bukidnon. Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the

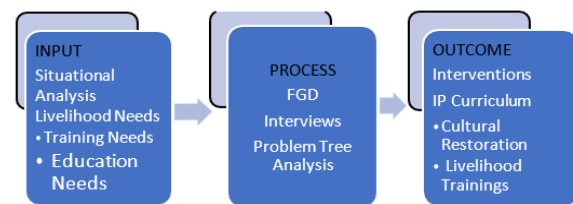
wellbeing of those people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) [11].

Community engagement can be complex. To be effective, we need to recognize and respect the diversity and assets of the communities we are engaging. There are many different methods to engage and collaborate with communities. Meeting with communities in-person is often best for establishing and building trusting relationships, especially if you are forming a new connection. However, technology has increased options for connecting with communities and partners and may help increase your reach for some types of engagement activities [12].

Community members and partners may face barriers to collaborating with the proponents. To be successful in engaging the community, cultural barriers such as need to accommodate certain cultural values to ensure all members are able to participate can be mitigated by being mindful of cultural and religious observances and events when choosing a meeting date and time and by asking community leaders or key informants about the most culturally appropriate way to engage community members and then adapt your approach [13].

**Conceptual Framework**

This study is guided by the principles of the Active Community Engagement Continuum (ACE) which provides a framework for analyzing community engagement and the role the community plays in influencing lasting behavior change Russell, *et al.* [14] presents the three levels of engagement across five characteristics of engagement under ACE. The levels of engagement, which move from consultative to cooperative to collaborative, reflect the realities of program partnerships and programs. These three levels of community engagement can be adapted, with specific activities based on these categories of action. The five characteristics of engagement are community involvement in assessment; access to information; inclusion in decision making; local capacity to advocate institutions and governing structures; and accountability of institutions to the public. At each successive level of engagement, community members move closer to being change agents themselves rather than targets for change, and collaboration increases, as does community empowerment. At the final (collaborative) level, communities and stakeholders are represented equally in the partnership, and all parties are mutually accountable for all aspects of the project. In this study, community engagement of the participants was evident when they cooperated in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews during the situational analysis and collaborated in suggesting intervention programs to address their needs and problems. These activities were coordinated with the LGUs and the NCIP.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### *On Cultural Restoration*

Cultural restoration came out as the prime need of the communities as revealed by the key informants. The key informants, which are the elders and tribal council members from each barangay, revealed their dire need of support from the different sectors of the government and other civic groups including the academe to help their young people be reoriented with their indigenous culture as most of them no longer speak their own language. The Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) emphasized the need to teach their young people literacy about their culture, and to train them in their ethnic dances.

In Lumbayao, Valencia City, most of the tribal elder-participants shared the same sentiments regarding the degradation of their cultural practices. In addition to not being able to retell their folk stories, most of their young people cannot speak their own language and they no longer pass interviews for scholarships intended for indigenous people. In Panalsalan Maramag, Bukidnon, the language is used when speaking to members of their own tribe, but they use Binisaya when speaking to other people who cannot understand their own language.

They also practice the "sala," a punishment for discriminating against their people and those who commit crimes and choose to be settled using their customary laws. A bae-mediator of these conflicts really wanted their children to be acquainted with their customary laws. The tribal elders and barangay councilors in Lumbayao, Valencia City lamented that they find it hard to transfer their cultural practices to their children because they are also adjusting to what most people are doing in the community. However, there are instances when their customary laws can be applied in isolated cases, like settling family disputes such as infidelity between husbands and wives. They would be settled with an offering and a promise that any of those who committed the mistake would not do it again. To ensure that they can still retain their cultural beliefs and practices and regain respect from others, they initiated a move to the barangay Council that they will be allowed to celebrate an Indigenous Peoples' (IP) Day. Since then, they were given the chance to celebrate their IP Day since 2013 to give their culture the chance to be known and be felt both by their own people and other members of the community. It is only during these celebrations when they can present their own dances, songs and play their musical instruments.

#### *Training Needs*

Most of the farm-related training that the IP community needs relate to coffee propagation and marketing. Coffee planters in Dalwangan, Malaybalay City, in particular, need training on pest control because pests have affected most of their plants such as coffee-like Arabica, Catimore, Robusta, and Sweet Coffee. The prolonged infestation of their coffee plants usually caused the delay of their harvest and the quality of berries. This also affected their family income because coffee propagation and postharvest activities involved men, women, and children. With their growing population, tribal elders felt the need to expose their people to more livelihood training in their ancestral domain, like growing high-value crops such as adlay, bananas, flowers, and sweet potatoes. Adlay is

becoming popular because they know of some friends who have earned much from planting adlay. However, their intent to propagate these crops is being deterred by a lack of funds. Only a few of them own carabaos and cows, and some of them spend a lot on renting carabaos and cows.

Further, the livelihood needs of IPs in Lumbayao, Valencia City also relate to planting coffee and other crops. Key informants regretted cutting their coffee trees because coffee beans at present are sold at a very high price, especially if they have a quality classification. With this development, they expressed their interest in planting coffee again but suggested that the training could be about a variety of coffee that could grow in a warmer environment and which are resistant to stem borers and other coffee diseases. It could also include coffee management strategies and necessary preparations to succeed in propagating coffee. Other trainings that they would like to undergo are all about raising the quality of their coffee products. They also have problems with pricing, especially in remote places where there are no farm to market roads. Among those who were bought at low prices are their fruits like mango, banana (Lacatan, Tundan, Cardaba), and vegetables like squash, pepper, eggplant, tomatoes, and bitter melon (ampalaya). It is the same case with rice and corn, which are oftentimes attacked by the black bug and stem borers. Furthermore, the same case applies to the prices of their cassava and their livestock such as chicken, pigs, cows, and carabaos. They still wanted to be trained in business and financial literacy or bookkeeping.

Women in Panalsalan, Maramag, Bukidnon are empowered as they are performing men's tasks in addition to those they can do in the household and in the farms. Other elderly baes, on the other hand, know how to make mats and baskets while others can make a natural concoction of ginger and other ingredients like menthol and chili as herbal medicines for those bitten by dogs and other animals or insects. Others served as "hilots" but they stopped when a penalty was charged for those women who would give birth at home with the assistance of the "hilots."

Pertaining to their crops, the elders planted coffee in the past but were discouraged because they just wilted and their leaves turned yellow and eventually died. The roots rotted and the stems were easily twisted. They did not know where to ask for assistance in treating the coffee borers and nobody came to help them. Since that time, only a few have continued to plant coffee. Some of them, however, are interested in planting adlay but want to be provided with a milling machine.

Aside from coffee and adlay, they also wanted to plant sweet potatoes, vegetables, sugarcane, corn, rice, pepper, and fruits like durian.

In summary, the study found that the respondents (IPs) in five (5) ancestral domains of Bukidnon are experiencing problems with cultural degradation, specifically the diminishing interest of their people, especially the young, in performing their cultural practices such as ethnic dances and songs, speaking their own language, and practicing customary laws. They also admit to being incompetent in farming skills, having been unable to prevent pests and diseases in crops such as coffee and other vegetables. They also lack livelihood opportunities;

thus they need the training to equip them with skills and capabilities.

Figure 2 presents the problem tree analysis of the common problems encountered by the respondents.

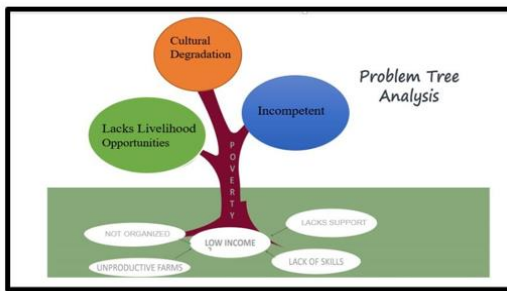


Figure 2. Problem Tree Analysis.

### Intervention Programs

Based on the results of the situational analysis among the respondents of the study, objective analysis has been formulated and the supposed intent of the proposed interventions would be to establish cultural restoration wherein cultural practices and beliefs are made manifest in the lives of the respondents, giving them opportunities to be trained to equip them with life skills that will eventually give them the opportunities to avail of more livelihood activities.

The design and development of the interventions are based on the problems and needs of the respondents of the study. To address the cultural degradation of many IPs, not only among our respondents but also those who are experiencing the same problems in the region, the following projects were proposed and were approved for implementation in October 2020- September 2022. These were presented and were approved by the Philippine Canada Education Consortium (PhilCanEdu) Consortium and CHED-IAS for funding. It is expected that these projects will eventually address the respondents' problems relating to poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and illiteracy. Among these projects will involve: Curricular Design and Development Towards Inclusive and Quality Tertiary IP Education; Autochthonous Linguistic and Cultural Landscape in Southern Philippines; Customary and Local Governance of the IPs; Soil Profiling and Characterization of Coffee Farms; Enhancing Capability Skills in Establishing Coffee Agro-ecotourism Strategies for Farmers; Enhancing Farmers' Capability Skills in producing and utilizing biological control agents; and Capability Building for a Traditional and Non-Traditional Education System.

The proponents of these projects are researchers and extension enthusiasts at the university whose passion for community service has transcended from being a mere duty but a dedication to mankind. Similar projects were evaluated and were approved for CMU funding. These projects are currently supported by the Philippine Coffee Farmers' Advancement (PhilCafe) and are being implemented until December 2022. These projects include: Capability Building Skills Training for Social Enterprise Engagement in Bukidnon Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs); Adopt a Community Focusing on Language, Culture, and Arts of Indigenous Peoples; Enhancing Health Care, Education, Literacy, and Technical Training; and Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship Enhancement Program. In addition,

PhilCAFE awarded CMU some grants-in-aid for coffee planting materials for a backyard nursery and demo farm in support of the extension recipients of the university. .

### 4.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study found that the respondents (IPs) in five ancestral domains of Bukidnon experienced problems with cultural degradation, specifically the diminishing interest of their people, especially the young, in performing their cultural practices such as ethnic dances and songs, speaking their own language, and practicing the customary laws. They also admit that they are incompetent in farming skills and also lack livelihood opportunities, thus they need training to equip them with skills and capabilities.

### 5. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the training designs intended for interventions can be implemented to restore their cultural practices, to equip them with livelihood skills that will eventually qualify them for more livelihood opportunities.

It is also recommended that the field experts in the university be participative and provide mentoring for those who are involved in the implementation of the said projects.

### 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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