

Mangyans of Mindoro: An Assessment of the Indigenous Representation of the Mangyan Tribes in Oriental Mindoro

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The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) was enacted to protect and promote the basic rights of Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) in the Philippines. Section 16 mandates their representation in policy-making bodies and other local legislative councils through Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs). Through a qualitative approach, this study addressed how the needs and interests of the Mangyan tribes are represented through indigenous representation. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with five IPMRs; five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with five Mangyan tribes. Data were supplemented through an analysis of relevant programs, resolutions, ordinances, and other supporting documents. The results highlighted various IP-oriented policies and programs in the province, but these were mostly evident at the provincial level. With specific municipal issues unaddressed, the need for mandatory representation at all levels has become increasingly clear. While legislative accomplishments currently trail behind the growing number of executive-led programs, empowering IPMRs to take on a more active role in policymaking can further enhance the representation and recognition of the Mangyans of Mindoro. Existing resolutions and ordinances already show progress and potential for the approval of additional policies in the future.

Keywords: Mangyan, Indigenous Representation, Culture, Mindoro, Self-Governance

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Philippines is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse archipelago, home to various ethnolinguistic groups. Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) have existed long before colonial rule, lived on communally bounded and defined territories, and shared distinct languages, customs, and traditions. However, colonization forced many into isolation and exposed them to the oppression and marginalization of the modernized majority. Despite continuous efforts for national unity and development, these communities remain socially, politically, and economically disadvantaged.

Republic Act No. 8371, known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA), is a landmark law that aims to safeguard and promote four basic rights of ICCs/IPs —cultural integrity; social justice and human rights; ancestral domains and lands; and self-governance and empowerment. Section 16 of the IPRA guarantees their participation "at all levels of decision-making," particularly when discussing cases involving "their rights, lives, and destinies," as well as the right to develop their own indigenous political systems.¹ With this, ICCs/IPs are provided with mandatory representation. The Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) represents his/her community in policy-making bodies and other local legislative councils.²

The term “Mangyan” refers collectively to the eight tribes in the island of Mindoro—Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Tau-buid, Bangon, Buhid, Hanunuo, and Ratagnon.³ In accordance with their right to participate in decision-making, the municipalities of Oriental Mindoro have IP representatives in the municipal council along with an IPMR on the provincial board. Given these developments, this study will further assess the progress of the indigenous representation of the Mangyan tribes in the local legislation of Oriental Mindoro.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study primarily addresses how the needs and interests of the Mangyan tribes are represented through indigenous representation. It explores the exercise and observance of the Mangyan tribes’ mandatory representation in the local legislative councils of Oriental Mindoro by examining the specific policies and programs that have been lobbied and advanced through indigenous representation and analyzing how these policies and programs guarantee the recognition of the Mangyan tribes in the province.

¹ Republic Act No. 8371, sec.16.

² RA 8371, sec.16.

³ California State University East Bay, “Mangyan,” *California State University East Bay*, n.d. <https://www.csueastbay.edu/museum/virtual-museum/the-philippines/peoples/mangyan.html>.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The IPRA recognizes the fourfold rights of ICCs/IPs. This study centers on the Right to Self-governance and Empowerment, specifically the right to participate in decision-making. It tackled the political representation of ICCs/IPs at the local level, with particular emphasis on the Mangyans of Mindoro.

The Mangyan tribes reside in the mountains of Mindoro Island, which is divided into two provinces: Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro. This study is only limited to the Province of Oriental Mindoro and its municipalities — Puerto Galera, San Teodoro, Baco, Naujan, Victoria, Socorro, Pola, Gloria, Pinamalayan, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay, and Bulalacao. The foremost legislative body it examined is the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Oriental Mindoro.

Aside from the Provincial IPMR in the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, municipalities are also mandated to have an IPMR. However, at the time of this study's conclusion, only eight have IP representatives — Puerto Galera, San Teodoro, Baco, Naujan, Bansud, Bongabong, Mansalay, and Bulalacao.

Among the eight Mangyan tribes, only seven inhabit Oriental Mindoro. The Ratagnons are found in the southernmost tip of Occidental Mindoro. Thus, only the Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Tau-buid, Bangon, Buhid, and Hanunuo tribes are covered by this study.

The findings on the representation of Mangyans in municipal councils are not all-encompassing and are only based on the four Municipal IPMRs who agreed to interview. Similarly, out of the seven tribes, only five have agreed, giving further limitations to the generalized findings of this study.

Data is derived from the experiences of the ICCs/IPs and documents of policies and programs developed through indigenous representation, but the analysis of data will come from an etic (outsider's) perspective.

Furthermore, this study solely focused on resolutions and ordinances at the provincial level, while the analysis of documented programs is limited to online sources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study drew key concepts from Will Kymlicka, through his work 'Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights'. Kymlicka's claim on the rights of minorities to special representation is fundamentally related to the political phenomenon tackled in this paper.

Kymlicka introduced a liberal framework of minority rights. He defined a multi-nation state as a state with two or more coexisting nations⁴ and the smallest groups were referred to as the national minority, “a historical community, occupying a given territory or homeland, and sharing a distinct language and culture.”⁵ According to Kymlicka, minorities must be recognized as distinct and be given special rights in order to preserve their cultural heritage and identity. The three types of group-differentiated rights are self-government rights, polyethnic rights, and special representation rights. *Self-government rights* ensure their political autonomy and territorial jurisdiction while *polyethnic rights* help promote cultural practices and social integration.⁶

Moreover, national minorities are entitled to *special representation rights* which include participation in the decision-making processes of the government.⁷ These rights guarantee the representation of minority groups in political institutions. Kymlicka emphasized that amplifying the voice of minorities in the government to express views on local issues is crucial in ensuring the survival of their culture and identity. Special representation rights allow them to take part in formulating, proposing, debating, and voting on legislative bodies.

To ensure the representation of indigenous views and opinions, the Philippine government commits an IPMR in the local legislation. Kymlicka’s liberal theory of multiculturalism provides an essential framework for assessing the political representation of the Mangyan tribes in Oriental Mindoro. In order to protect their rights as a minority group, it is highly imperative that their collective interests be represented in policymaking bodies such as the Sangguniang Panlalawigan.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A *qualitative approach* was used to assess the indigenous representation of the Mangyan Tribes in Oriental Mindoro. This method provides detailed descriptions and deeper insights into political phenomena⁸ by utilizing data derived from the participants' experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. It involves a process of induction, whereby different concepts and theories are constructed from the collected data. Participants were able to share and explain their own experiences, thus giving more depth to the phenomena being studied.

This study also utilized a *phenomenological research design* which is a method “used to discover and develop an understanding of experiences as perceived by those living the

⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

⁵ Kymlicka, 11.

⁶ Kymlicka, 27-31.

⁷ Kymlicka, 32-33.

⁸ Shoshanna Sofaer, “Qualitative methods: what are they and why use them?,” *Health Services Research* 34, no.5 (1999): 1101.

experience.” Phenomenology is particularly fitting for this study, as it involves the collection of data from the perspective of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon —the Mangyans of Mindoro.

PARTICIPANTS

Through *homogenous sampling*, members of the Mangyan community were selected as participants due to their mutual background and experiences as ICCs/IPs in the province.

A total of five participants took part in the Key Informant Interview (KII). The IPMR of Oriental Mindoro is a key informant for this study, given his involvement in policymaking as a regular member of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan. Four municipal IPMRs from San Teodoro, Baco, Naujan, and Bongabong also provided information on the status of indigenous representation in their respective municipalities and the overall recognition of Mangyans in the province. They are most suited as participants, given their knowledge and experience as leaders and representatives of the indigenous community.

Meanwhile, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted with tribal elders, who shared their encounter with the mainstream government, and Mangyan college students, who discussed their experiences while studying in the lowlands. Five tribes agreed to join the FGD and each group comprised three members, as suggested by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The selection of participants and schedule for interviews were assisted by representatives from the NCIP, DWCC – Mangyan Student Organization, and Mt. Tabor Mangyan Formation Center. All in all, their collective thoughts and viewpoint helped paint a bigger picture of the phenomenon.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

The approval of the NICP-MIMAROPA was first secured before proceeding with the interviews. After complying with the required documents, a work order was forwarded to the provincial office to formally authorize the data collection. The KIIs and FGDs were carried out in close coordination with the NCIP-Provincial Office.

A total of five KIIs and five FGDs were administered. KIIs were carried out with the IPMRs, while FGDs were conducted with tribal leaders and students from different tribes. NCIP representatives were also present during the conduct of the FGDs.

The interview questions were mainly open-ended to give participants more scope and detail in their responses. These questions were prepared beforehand to guide the flow of the interviews,

but additional questions were also probed to supplement certain responses and improve rapport with the participants.

Both KIIs and FGDs were conducted face-to-face and in Tagalog. Answers were audio-recorded, fully transcribed verbatim, and later translated into English. Once the transcription was accomplished, the data was analyzed and interpreted through *thematic analysis*. This type of treatment categorizes qualitative data into clusters of similar entities or conceptual categories, and identifies consistent patterns and relationships between themes.⁹

In addition, the examination of programs, resolutions, ordinances, and other supporting materials was done through *documentary analysis*. This is a type of social research method wherein documents are interpreted to bring clarity and context to an assessment topic.¹⁰

Methodological triangulation was used to verify the findings from both the thematic analysis and documentary analysis. This method is applied to ensure objectivity and help refine the study by addressing gaps and inconsistencies.¹¹ With the use of different methods of data collection, triangulation creates a convergence of evidence that fosters credibility.

SUMMARY

The Philippines is home to various ICCs/IPs spread out across its archipelago, all of whom face inadequate representation and recognition. While the government strives to provide for them, efforts have been often constrained and insufficient, highlighting the need to institutionalize representation to ensure their meaningful participation in government decisions. The representation of ICCs/IPs in the Philippines is enforced through Section 16 of the IPRA which mandates an IPMR in local legislative councils. Through this mandate, the IPMRs play a crucial role in policymaking by representing their tribes and facilitating communication with the government.

The Mangyans comprise an indigenous community found in the island of Mindoro, with seven of its tribes residing in the Oriental Mindoro province. To address how the needs and interests of the Mangyan tribes are rendered through indigenous representation, KIIs and FGDs

⁹ Lia Figgou and Vassilis Pavlopoulos, "Social Psychology: Research Methods," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* Second Edition 22 (2015): 546.

¹⁰ Glenn Bowen, "Document analysis as a qualitative research method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009), doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027

¹¹ Indeed Editorial Team, "Triangulation in Research: 7 Common Types," *Indeed*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/triangulation-in-research#:~:text=Methodological%20triangulation%20is%20the%20process%20of%20using%20multiple,refine%20the%20study%20by%20identifying%20gaps%20or%20inconsistencies>.

were conducted with twenty members of the Mangyan community. Five IPMRs participated in the KIIs, while fifteen individuals—three from each of the five tribes involved—took part in the FGDs.

Mangyan Representation in local legislative councils

The Mangyan tribes are spread across the fourteen municipalities of Oriental Mindoro. While there is an IPMR in the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, only the municipalities of Puerto Galera, San Teodoro, Baco, Naujan, Bansud, Bongabong, Mansalay, and Bulalacao have IPMRs in the Sangguniang Bayan. Six municipalities have no IPMRs yet. Some barangays have IPMRs but no data was available on their exact number.

The municipal IPMRs represent multiple tribes, as each tribe resides in more than one municipality. Among the seven tribes found in the province, the *Iraya* and *Hanunuo* are represented in all its municipalities. The *Alangan*, *Bangon*, and *Buhid* tribes lack IPMRs in one of the municipalities they reside in. The *Tadyawan* tribe spans across seven municipalities but only has IPMRs in two. The *Tau-buid* tribe has no representative at all. Nonetheless, the Mangyans of Mindoro have a provincial IPMR who represents all the seven tribes in the Sangguniang Panlalawigan.

Conflicting views initially emerged as to whether the IPMR must be included as a sectoral representative in Oriental Mindoro because the Local Government Code of 1991 and the IPRA did not provide clear guidelines about the exercise of mandatory representation. The problem was later resolved through a resolution that officially welcomed the provincial IPMR as a member of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Oriental Mindoro.

IP-ORIENTED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

The interviews revealed many issues confronting the Mangyans—limited access to healthcare and education, discrimination, unemployment, lack of consultation, and an unprotected ancestral domain.

Inaccessible medical facilities, shortage of doctors, and unequal treatment led to gaps among the Mangyans' health. Many children struggled with education due to language barriers, financial constraints, and lack of resources, which were later intensified by discrimination and restricted job opportunities. There is also a need for better road infrastructure to facilitate travel and allow access to both education and healthcare.

The Mangyans also reiterated their concerns for their ancestral domain. As such, the awarding of Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) is a frequent call among them.

Development projects and policies were often implemented without consultation, leading to a disparity in resource allocation. Thus, consultation mechanisms and government responsiveness became necessary.

In response to these issues, policies and programs have been implemented in the province. Most IP-oriented programs and activities were initiated by local government agencies and further implemented with the support of the IPMR and other IP leaders. These initiatives focused on healthcare, education, livelihood, and shelter.

The provincial government provided healthcare services such as vaccinations and medical check-ups, as well as clean water supply and housing facilities. Education and livelihood were advanced through financial and technological assistance, skills training, and construction of facilities. Employment opportunities increased. Outreach activities were also conducted.

The local government established consultative mechanisms and organized summits to facilitate discussions between the Mangyans and government agencies. The ordinance which established the Provincial Indigenous Peoples Development and Advisory Council (PIPDAC), which serves as an advisory body to the provincial government, was also amended recently.

Following the induction of the provincial IPMR, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan accredited seven IP Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through a series of resolutions. A resolution was also passed mandating representation in all municipalities.

Yet, challenges remain in ensuring wider program implementation and sufficient budget allocation. The lack of proper road infrastructure continues to hinder access to schools and proper medical facilities. The awarding of CADTs have been limited, with many tribes still awaiting recognition. Measures on inequality have also been inconsistent and often only seen in employment; regular benefits such as those for senior citizens have yet to reach many Mangyan communities.

Withal, budget constraints prevent IPMRs from fully supporting their constituents. Although discrimination lessened, stereotypes still limit the IPMRs from thoroughly performing their functions as a minority within the mainstream.

CONCLUSION

The Mangyans of Mindoro are spread across municipalities, with varying levels of representation. While some tribes, like the *Iraya* and *Hanunuo*, enjoy full representation in municipalities, the *Tau-buid* tribe lacks any. Despite these differences, there is a Provincial IPMR who represents all the tribes in the province, providing some form of representation to those with limited representation at the municipal level.

Although there were initial queries regarding the status of IPMRs in the local *sanggunian*, these concerns have been successfully addressed, resulting in their formal recognition within the province. The presence of the IPMRs in the local legislative councils of Oriental Mindoro reflects the recognition of the Mangyan tribes' right to representation.

Aside from the IPMRs' involvement in policy making, they perform broader functions in the implementation of programs and dissemination of information. This led to vast improvements in healthcare and education. Discrimination lessened, employment among Mangyans increased, and consultative mechanisms developed. Significant strides have been made especially as consultations became more frequent. The accreditation of different indigenous CSOs also reflected the growing recognition of IPs in the province. All these provide reasonable basis to assert the effectiveness of indigenous representation in Oriental Mindoro. The status of Mangyan tribes improved as programs and policies became more responsive to their needs.

Indigenous representation brought about substantial changes, but challenges persist in areas such as budget allocation, mainstream politics, and discrimination. Upon closer examination of the distribution of programs, it is also apparent that municipalities receive unequal levels of assistance, though there are province-wide programs that cater to all areas. As a result, improvements are typically viewed at a broader provincial level, with specific issues at the municipal level often being overlooked.

When the scope of authority is excessively broad, the effectiveness of the IPMRs can be compromised. Therefore, it is crucial to have IPMRs designated at both the municipal and barangay levels to ensure that the needs and interests of the community are properly addressed. The influence of mainstream politics must also be carefully observed to prevent IPs from adopting certain ill practices and cause them to lose sight of genuine representation and public service.

The involvement of IPMRs in decision-making and the growing recognition of the Mangyan tribes opened doors for the protection of their rights and well-being but more efforts must be made to maximize the benefits they are entitled to. Hence, these key issues must be addressed.

Empowering the IPMRs to assume a more prominent role in policymaking will enhance the representation and recognition of the Mangyan tribes further. Currently, there is a growing number of executive-led programs. As members of the local legislative council, the IPMRs have yet to produce adequate resolutions and ordinances for the Mangyan community. Albeit, the existing resolutions and ordinances hint progress and show potential for the approval of additional policies in the future.

By ensuring adequate representation, the needs and interests of specific tribes are effectively tackled, and issues that are overlooked can be brought to the forefront of public discourse and policy making. Achieving mandatory representation at all levels and striving for more legislative accomplishments is a must. Through sustained collaboration and increased

dialogues with the government, more progress can be accomplished for the sake of the Mangyans of Mindoro.

RECOMMENDATION

The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) has been instrumental in advancing the rights of ICCs/IPs in the Philippines. As the representation of IPs in local legislative councils varies across the country, this study focused on a specific indigenous community in Oriental Mindoro.

The Mangyans of Mindoro consist of different tribes with varying languages, cultures, and customs. As they encounter challenges in representation, this study delved into the exercise of indigenous representation in the province and its implication for the whole Mangyan community. The present findings offered a comprehensive overview of their increased political involvement, showing how much improvement has been made thus far, and stressing the potential for further improvement. It examined the extent to which programs and policies have been oriented towards their needs and interests.

As such, this study fostered a deeper understanding of ICCs/IPs, particularly the Mangyans. While it does not claim to represent the entire population, it emphasized how marginalized sectors, and even the most seemingly invisible, must be included in government decisions. By shedding light on previously overlooked and unaddressed issues, this study promotes awareness and encourages informed discussions about the Mangyan tribes. It underscores the importance of inclusivity among the marginalized. It informs and allows local officials, stakeholders, and community members to develop more targeted approaches to improve the well-being of the Mangyans of Mindoro.

For further enrichment, future researchers are recommended to focus on specific municipalities within Oriental Mindoro to provide more specific findings. Other points that can be assessed include the traditional selection processes of the Mangyans, their existing leadership structures, and the persistent issues of insurgency and armed conflict. Finally, replicating the approach of this study in other ICCs/IPs across the country can generate comparative findings and contribute to a broader understanding of indigenous representation in different contexts.

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