

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PARTICIPATIONS: EXPERIENCES OF THE MANOBO  
TRIBE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROJECTS**



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## **ABSTRACT**

The primary objective of this study was to identify the issues on the participation experiences of Indigenous People, particularly the Manobo Tribe, in Barangay Osmeña, Municipality of La Paz, Region XIII Caraga, Agusan Del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines. It also aimed to determine the corresponding effects and efforts to preserve the identity of the Indigenous People on their territory. The study used the descriptive design, was qualitative in nature, and utilized Focus Group Discussion in gathering data.

Findings shows that there were indeed issues on participation of the Indigenous People in the local government projects among the Manobo tribe, in terms of the delivery of programs and services, decision making, formulating policy and implementation. Most of them have expressed that not having an opportunity for participation placed them apart from development work to nowhere in the near future development, thus it exacerbates ignorance that hinders them from accessing berries and benefits given by the Government units.

The researcher sees the need of a special orientation catering not only for the academic inquiries on IPs but also to help them and give them the awareness of their rights and the right of participation in Local Government Projects fully and actively.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Study

Every human being is entitled to live with dignity and participate in all the activities of the state. According to the United Nations (March 2008), "Indigenous peoples have the right to participate fully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the state" as stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in Article 5 (UHDR as cited in Aportadera, 2012).

Indigenous People are defined as different linguistic, ethnic groups who are vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization, and oppression. These groups have survived colonizers, capitalist and imperialist nations of the west and still they have been able to preserve their culture, land, ancestral domain, territory, political system, and practices. As a result, a special set of political rights in accordance with international law has been set forth by international organizations such as the United Nations ([www.un.org/forestpeople/pdf](http://www.un.org/forestpeople/pdf)).

The Indigenous Peoples' cultures were different from other populations i.e. Non-Indigenous that were often politically dominant. They have ethnic identity as the basis of their continuous survival as Indigenous People. This is according to the Indigenous Peoples' culture patterns, social organization and their laws. These people had been able to endure in their way of life since ancient times, determined and firm, to reach the present period. The Indigenous People are the owners of ancestral land, and have a common ancestry with the original occupants of particular lands or territory. They lived under the tribal system, members of an indigenous community, dress, means of livelihood, and language in their mother tongue as a means of communication at home

or in the family and residence is in a certain part of the country or in a certain region of the states or the world (<http://indigenouspeoples.nl>).

Barangay Osmeña is located in the municipality of La Paz, an underdeveloped and rural area of Agusan Del Sur. The barangay has limited minimum resources for living in the community. Many immigrants have occupied and owned the land in the area. These immigrants have come from different places and were non-indigenous people. Since they own big parcels of land, they are considered as landlords. Fruit farms, rubber plantations, banana plantations, and palm farms are owned by the landlords. These have caused the displacement of the indigenous people in the area who have been relegated to being tillers of the land or overseers instead of being owners. The indigenous people in the barangay still own property but it is small compared with those of non-indigenous people. The local government officials have strong connections with the landlords. As observed in the country, it was usually the landlords' families who also got elected into government positions. Therefore, the rich and the landed are the policy makers of the country.

The Manobo Tribe in Barangay Osmeña also faced several difficulties and challenges. They were very poor and could hardly make both ends meet. Since they mostly worked for landlords, they received wages below the minimum set by the government for agricultural workers. The law set the minimum wage for agricultural workers at Ph 258. The cost of living might not be that high in the countryside yet the wage earned by the workers could hardly support basic needs of the family. They did not have a decent house where their families could live. Many of them have had limited access to health care. A high number of children were malnourished in the community of the Manobo tribe. Therefore, the quality of life of the Manobos in Barangay Osmeña was somewhat lacking when examined in terms of promoting well-being and development. The researcher took interest in the situation of the Manobo at Barangay Osmeña; hence,

the study on the experiences of participation of the Manobo Tribe in Barangay Osmeña, La Paz with local government unit projects.

The Manobo Tribe originally belonged to the Austronesian people who came from the mainland of Asia a thousand years ago. Manobo simply means “people” or “person”; alternate names include Manuvu and Minuvu. The term may have originated from “Mansuba,” a combination of man (people) and suba (river). They occupied the surroundings of Bukidnon specifically on the boundaries of Agusan Del Sur, Bukidnon, Cotabato, Davao Del Sur, Misamis Oriental, the Southwestern part of Bukidnon in Mulita, Kalilangan and Pangantucan”(http://www.bukidnon.gov.ph).

Contemporary realities show that many Indigenous Peoples experience exclusion from participating fully in many development work initiatives. Worldwide, the Indigenous Peoples were right to be accorded with all the human rights and special rights based on international instruments and national laws, but the stark reality was they instead, experienced the limitation if not curtailment of their rights. In many countries, they were not given equal opportunity to access fully their right to education, employment, social life, health care and most importantly, their right to self-determination. They were not given much privilege in contributing to the development of the world. They were suppressed and dominated by non-indigenous people. The examples are seen in India, Burma, Thailand, African countries, and in the Philippines, where many IP communities can be found. Even within the indigenous territory they experienced that the right of participation has not been exercised well (TOH GODA, 2009).

The Manobos of Barangay Osmeña, La Paz lived in interior areas and made it difficult to access government services because the road was impassable and also they were economically hard-hit. The majority of Manobo people did not have access to government programs and services and only very few of them were able to access

programs like the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (Conditional Cash Transfer) and livelihood projects. However, they encountered many different problems in accessing of such programs. They did not get the benefits on time, and it was not enough to support the schooling of children and medication during sickness. In short, the services they received hardly made differences in their lives and in the lives of their children.

These added to the feelings of being inferior and the marginalization of IPs by the government. The Indigenous People were wary of government people. Hence, the deliveries of basic services of the government were affected because of the physical distance and the estranged relationship between the Indigenous People and the service providers. The study established the experiences of Indigenous Peoples as they exercise their right to participation in the Programs and Services provided for them by the State. Moreover, the study had ascertained the perceived level of Indigenous Peoples' participation in relation to the various Programs and Services extended to them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized the theory of the Sherry L. Arnstein which established a ladder of citizen participation. The theory identifies the eight levels of participation by ladder steps or rungs: Rung 1, manipulation, and Rung 2, therapy: on these two rungs are states of non-participation that have been managed by some to substitute genuine participation. Their real objective is not enabling people to participate in planning and conducting programs but to enable power holders to educate the participants. Rungs 3 and 4: these rungs progress to tokenism that allows "have-nots" to hear and to have voice. (3) Informing and (4) Consultation. When they are proffered by power holders as the total extent of participation, citizens indeed hear and are heard. But under these conditions, they lack the power to ensure that their views will be heard by the powerful.

When participation is restricted to these levels, there is no follow through, no muscle, hence there is no assurance of changing the status quo. Rung 5, placation is simply a higher level tokenism because the ground rules allow "have-nots" to advise but retain for the power holders the continued right to decide. Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Citizens can enter in to a Rung 6 partnership that enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At the top most rungs, Rung 7, delegated power, and Rung 8, citizen control, have-not citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power" (<https://www.planning.org/pas/memo/2007>).

The theory was used in examining the IP experiences of participation in government initiated projects and services of the identified group of Manobo People based on their actual responses and anecdotes using the defined research methodologies. The government officials and service providers who are the power holders and their practices would also be looked at based on the above-mentioned theory. It will be worth comparing the responses between the recipients and service providers in terms of participation of the receivers of the services. Did they have reciprocal communication to come up with good plan and to implement the projects in the Manobo community?

In the researcher's views and observations during the visitation to the area he found that in most of the cases, the government power holders used the public forum in order to show that they have public relations in the government projects, in fact it was not. They used the public forum for signing the documents and said they had consulted the Indigenous People in the projects. Also the Indigenous People, who had signed, felt that they had achieved power and had participated in implementing the projects, however, it was not true. In the grassroots level people did not participate, they just accepted whatever the government authorities decided for them. They were misled by



the government authorities in terms of a sense of participation in the projects. This was evident to the researcher when he had the chance to talk with the Manobo and the service providers. The theory was utilized to see the different stages and power achieved by the IP in participating to projects. It was true that there were issues in local government, which limits the IP participation in government projects.

The theory was utilized to identify the level of participation of Manobo People and the level of the effort of government authorities in ensuring participation in local government projects. The study sought to answer this through the suggestions and recommendations of the Manobo.

The theory was also used for analyzing the partnership between the government and the Manobo Tribe based on the projects intended for the community. However, the partnership does not mean that the Manobo people had been given full authority to decide for the projects. It is just limited to the agreement of projects.

### **Statement of the problem**

This study identified and generated data on the experiences and perceived level of participation of the IPs in their respective communities. Specifically, it sought to answer the following question:

1. What is the Socio-demographic profile of the Indigenous People of Barangay Osmeña, Agusan Del Sur?
2. What are the experiences of IP with regards to participations in local government projects?
  - A. Before the projects' implementation?
  - B. During the projects' implementation?
  - C. After the projects' implementation?

3. What is the perceived level of participation among IPs in local government projects?
4. What are the suggestions of Indigenous Peoples in terms of IP participation in Local Government projects?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study would provide knowledge, analysis and recommendations on the experiences and perceived level of participation of the IPs at Barangay Osmeña, La Paz, Agusan Del Sur in local government projects. It also looked at the experiences of the Indigenous People participating in various programs and processes in policy making, program identification and implementation in the community in terms of local government projects.

The agencies and organizations operating in the area of the Manobo Tribe at Osmeña, La Paz, Agusan Del Sur will also be examined in terms of mobilizing participation among the IPs. The agencies and organizations are as follows:

**The Municipal Social Welfare Development** should be able to formulate policies and guidelines to respond to the needs of the Manobo People so that they could participate in social services and programs. It should also find appropriate and culturally-sensitive strategies to enhance and strengthen the capacity of the Manobo in participation.

**The National Commission on Indigenous People** should be able to focus on full participation of Indigenous People especially the Manobo tribe. It should involve them in processes and procedures of decision making in formulating policies and guidelines for the implementation of projects. NCIP also should be able to emphasize the right to participation of Indigenous Peoples, creating opportunities and space in local government projects.

**The Non-Government Organizations** should be able to respond in creating equal participation among the IPs and non-IPs in the project(s) they operate in the area. They should also be able to involve the Indigenous People in assessing, formulating policies for guidelines, and implementing the projects.

**Ateneo de Davao University and other Academic Institutions** will use the findings and analysis of this study as an example of the theory of Arnstein on citizen participation. It could also be used as a framework in examining and analyzing the issues of participation of Manobo Tribe in local government unit projects and to identify blocks to development. It could also help researchers to motivate them to take an interest in assessing the Indigenous Peoples and strengthening and enhancing the capacity of power sharing in decision making to improve and bring changes in their community and local government units.

**Social workers, development workers and other professionals** should also take responsibility to create opportunity and involve the Indigenous People in participating in assessing the issues and problems, finding solutions, and formulating policy in delivery of programs and services to the Indigenous Community.

**Indigenous People** can use the findings and recommendations for their community to help them understand the concept of participation in all phases of the government projects. It will also help in creating an enabling environment of learning to enable people to think of and identify projects that are needed by the community and that can help them take an initiative to involve themselves in the formulation of policy and guidelines in project implementation. It could help in motivating the Indigenous people to take a pro-active role in Local Government Projects and in the end, in governance.

Hence, the result of this study might lead to institutionalizing mechanisms which would ensure full participation of the Indigenous People in the local government unit projects in the local community.

This will also facilitate creating opportunities for Indigenous people and educating them on issues that affect them in terms of participation in local government projects. Through this, those once seen as weak and powerless people will have the ability to express their views and positions on different issues faced by the indigenous communities especially the Manobo Tribe.

### **Scope and Limitations of Study**

The study focused on the experiences and perceived level of participation of the Indigenous People in the community. It also looked into the social services and programs provided by government agencies vis-à-vis the Manobos' participation to activities like livelihood projects, health care, 4Ps and other services. The study is limited to Barangay Osmeña, Municipality of La Paz, Agusan Del Sur.

It utilized purposive data derived from the Focus Group Discussion among the indigenous male and female respondents. Moreover, this study is limited to IP youths, adults and elders aged from 22-75 years belonging to the Manobo tribe. There were forty (43) respondents from the Manobo community and four (4) respondents for the key informants interviews from the Local Government Units. It used Bisaya as a primary language in data gathering. Since the researcher had limited ability in the local dialect, he had facilitators from the local people for the translations during the actual data gathering. There was also a documenter during the FGD to record the interviews.

## **Operational Definition of Terms**

**Experiences of IP** refers to experiences of IP particularly with Local Government Projects and Programs.

**Indigenous People** refers to the members of the Manobo tribes residing at Barangay Osmeña, Municipality of La Paz Agusan Del Sur, of youths, adults, and elders.

**Participation Experiences** refers to the scope and extent of IP participation in local government projects and delivery of services in the Municipality of La Paz.

**Perceived level of Participation** refers to different levels of perception of IP to local government projects and programs.

**Socio demographic profile** refers to the profile of women and men respondents that experience political issues. It includes sex, religion, barangay, community, occupation, IPs minority group, civil status, status in the community and educational background.

**Suggestion and Recommendation**, refers to additional comments and recommendations for the local government to further enhance and improve service delivery.