

## The Lived Experiences of Manobo Tribe Living in Marginalized Community

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*Lived Experiences;*  
*Manobo;*  
*Marginalized Community;*  
*Social Exclusion.*

**Abstract**

This research explores the challenges faced by Manobo tribes in accessing social services and recognition within society. Through a qualitative approach using interviews, this study listens to people from a marginalized community in Barangay Ilomavis to understand their everyday lives. It highlights their struggles with social exclusion, securing a livelihood, managing finances, accessing sufficient food, and obtaining healthcare and education. The findings show that people are excluded from society in many ways. What keeps them disadvantaged is the combined effect of poverty, culture, and the place where they live. Even though government and non-government organizations try to help by offering services and aid, people still face ongoing difficulties in getting basic needs and opportunities. Beyond these challenges, the study shows that people want to improve their own lives and their community, especially through real improvements in roads, facilities, education, and healthcare. This study adds to the understanding of socio-economic realities faced by vulnerable communities and offers implications for policy makers, local government units, NGOs, and future researchers. Through these definitions, the study leverages on notions such as the Manobo Tribe and marginalized community and lived experience to further social justice discourse and equity in diverse contexts.

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**Kata Kunci:**

*Pengalaman Hidup;*  
*Manobo;*  
*Komunitas Termarginalkan;*  
*Eksklusi Sosial.*

**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh suku Manobo dalam mengakses layanan sosial serta memperoleh pengakuan di dalam masyarakat. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode wawancara, penelitian ini menggali pengalaman hidup masyarakat yang terpinggirkan di Barangay Ilomavis untuk memahami realitas kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Hasil penelitian menyoroti berbagai kesulitan yang dialami, seperti eksklusi sosial, keterbatasan dalam memperoleh mata pencaharian, pengelolaan keuangan, akses terhadap pangan yang cukup, serta layanan kesehatan dan pendidikan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa marginalisasi terjadi dalam berbagai bentuk, dengan kemiskinan, budaya, dan kondisi geografis sebagai faktor yang saling berkaitan dalam mempertahankan ketidakberdayaan masyarakat. Meskipun pemerintah dan organisasi non-pemerintah telah berupaya memberikan bantuan melalui berbagai program layanan, masyarakat masih menghadapi hambatan dalam memenuhi kebutuhan dasar dan memperoleh peluang yang lebih baik. Di sisi lain, penelitian ini juga mengungkap adanya harapan dan keinginan kuat dari masyarakat untuk meningkatkan kualitas hidup mereka dan komunitasnya, terutama melalui perbaikan infrastruktur, fasilitas umum, pendidikan, dan layanan kesehatan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman mengenai realitas sosial-ekonomi komunitas rentan serta memberikan implikasi bagi pembuat kebijakan, pemerintah daerah, organisasi non-pemerintah, dan peneliti

selanjutnya dalam mendorong keadilan sosial dan kesetaraan di berbagai konteks.

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## 1. Introduction

Indigenous Peoples play an important role in sustainable resource management, yet are disproportionately deprived and disadvantaged. Worldwide, they comprise only 6.2 percent of the population but constitute 18.2 percent of individuals living in extreme poverty and have life expectancy up to 20 years shorter than the general population. They also experience limited access to essential services, education, and infrastructure and employment opportunities. In Philippines 20% of indigenous households are without electricity compared with 5% non-Indigenous households (World Bank, 2025). Indigenous people often reside in a remote and mountainous area. Due to their frequent exclusion from official system they have faced barriers in accessing government services and in benefitting from appropriately targeted development program. Although the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) was enacted to protect Indigenous rights with corresponding recognition and protection of IP rights, unfortunately persistent implementation gaps are still widely observed, particularly in geographically isolated communities (World Bank, 2024).

The Manobo people living in the mountains near Kidapawan City demonstrate this paradox. Barangay Ilomavis is also home to a geothermal energy facility located within the ancestral domain of the Manobo people at the low hill of Mt. Apo. The tribe permitted the continued operation of two geothermal plants by the Energy Development Corporation (EDC) in return for royalty payments. The agreement allows the company to utilize geothermal resources in the area for a 25-year period, ending in 2044. According to tribal leaders, this royalty arrangement is unprecedented and is expected to provide a stable source of income to help sustain the community's livelihoods (Dinoy, 2019). While this arrangement is intended to provide financial stability, persistent reports on educational barriers, limited healthcare access and livelihood insufficiency, economic participation has not addressed the marginalization.

The literature on the Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines has largely focused on legal and policy frameworks and macroeconomic aggregates. Although these studies provide valuable structural focus, it often fails to capture how policy

gaps are experienced by Indigenous communities at their daily living. Anchored in a phenomenological approach, this study explores the significant challenges by the Manobo people residing in the marginalized communities—foregrounding their lived experiences and voices. Further it seeks to understand the Manobo people's perspectives on government service and program delivery and how these services impact their daily lives. Additionally, the research aims to uncover the hopes and aspirations of the Manobo people for themselves and for their community members.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines**

The Philippines' indigenous people have long struggled to maintain their rich customs problem. The historical and current land deprivation and resources underpins this complex issue. Nevertheless, these strong groups banded together and formed to demand that their right to be respected and acknowledged (Robiego et al., 2022). The difficulties faced by the indigenous people include health, life expectancy, income, housing, and education (Dacanay, 2020).

In Mindanao, manobo tribe is one of the largest indigenous groups living in the Philippines (Diansig et al., 2024). The word "Manobo" simply means "people" or "human," with alternate names Manuvu and Minuvu. The term may have originated from "Mansuba," a combination of the words "man" (people) and "suba" (river), Agusan, Bukidnon, Cotabato, Davao, Misamis Oriental, and Surigao Del Sur have the highest concentration of Manobo (Robiego et al., 2022). The Manobo primarily engage in rural agriculture. According to the study of Larena et al. (2021), they are of Austroasiatic descent from proto-South Chinese or proto-Austronesian people. The Manobo people live around the boundaries of Misamis Oriental, Davao, Cotabato, Bukidnon, and Agusan. Although they still speak their native tongues, which were impacted by the early Malay settlers, Cebuano has emerged as dominant language in social and political settings. Although there are still favorable opinions of the Agusan Manobo language, research shows that its actual use is steadily decreasing, especially outside of rural households (Campos, 2014; Nuñez, 2019, as cited in Diansig et al., 2024).

### **Manobo in Barangay Ilomavis**

The Barangay Ilomavis is situated approximately 12 kilometers from Kidapawan City in Cotabato Province serving as the ancestral domain of MADADMA. It has a total population of 3,483 with 72.76% belong to IPs that indicates that the total majority population in the barangay are IP. Among the Indigenous People, the Manobo tribe comprises 2,325 individuals representing

66.75% of the barangay total population and approximately 91.5% of the total IP population (City Planning and Development Office of Kidapawan City, 2023).

Lumot, Sayaban, and Umpan Village. Lumot, located farthest from the city and barangay center, can only be reached by a one-hour uphill hike from Barangay Balabag, or via horses or motorcycles. In addition, access to electricity and sanitation facilities is limited in this area, households have access to a natural spring in the residences. Umpan Village, originally one of the communal farms of IBASMADC, is the relocation site for tribal members from sitios Mawig, Pasong, and Lumot lacking their own plots of land and farms due to previous sales to other Manobo or outsiders. Umpan Village, located nearest to Barangay the center of Balabag, is accessible only by foot due to impassable roads (Alano, 2008).

In 2004 the ancestral domain title went to the Manobo community of Manobo-Apao Descendants Ancestral Domain of Mount Apo (MADADMA)– but it received only 3,177 hectares or less than one-fifth of its original claim. Further MADADMA manages the large ancestral domain in the Kidapawan barangays of Ilomavis and Balabag and the Magpet barangay of Kawayan. It is the first ancestral domain claim in Kidapawan to be formally issued a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) under the terms of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, and one of the first in the country (David, 2024). Barangay Ilomavis is the center of Manobo's ancestral domain where the geothermal plant can be found. In a historic agreement, the Manobo-Apao Descendants of Ancestral Domain of Mt. Apo (MADADMA) have given Energy Development Corporation (EDC) permission to run two geothermal plants in Barangay Ilomavis, the 52-MW Mindanao 1 and 54-MW Mindanao 2, for 25 years until 2044. The community will receive a royalty of one centavo for each kilowatt-hour produced. This agreement balances between protecting ancestral domain and providing the Manobo with a reliable source of income to support livelihoods while retaining control over their lands (Dinoy, 2019).

### **Poverty Alleviation**

Poverty is infamously hard to quantify since it has many facets and is regarded as unmeasurable in social science. The present approaches of measuring poverty are labor-intensive, expensive, and time-consuming. This makes it difficult for legislators to implement legislation aimed to reduce poverty into action. Indigenous communities face complex socioeconomic challenges and are among the marginalized groups in society. One of the most difficult and persistent societal issues in history is poverty. While studies on poverty are often broad and subject to large sampling mistakes, research on indigenous peoples usually adopts a

qualitative approach and is primarily meant for national policy-making (Onsay & Rabajante, 2025).

According to Republic Act 8425 also known as Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act of 1997, the needs of a Filipino family are classified into three categories: survival (food and nutrition, health, water and sanitation, clothing), security (shelter, peace and order, public safety, income and livelihood), and enabling (basic education and literacy, participation in community development, family and psycho-social care). According to Wenk (2017) of International Labor Organization (ILO), "basic needs" is the term used of ILO and other United Nations Agencies refers to essential goods and services (food, shelter, clothing, sanitation, education, etc.) and is necessary for a minimum standard of living. The concept is also reflected in World Health Organization's framework of health prerequisites, which emphasized that without these necessities, medical care and health-promoting interventions are unlikely to have lasting effect.

Indigenous people are among the most persecuted, ignored, and "invisible" communities in the world. They are socially and economically diverse and complex. Poverty remains the primary and persistent social problem (Onsay & Rabajante, 2025). According to census data, there are approximately 9.4 million indigenous people in the Philippines, or 8.7% of the total population, many of them reside in geographically disadvantaged areas. Reducing poverty in these regions can be accelerated by advancing the development of these areas through increased connectivity and other initiatives. Furthermore, the paper notes that additional ethnicity-disaggregated data that can accurately identify Indigenous Peoples and other ethnic minorities could improve poverty reduction tactics and social program targeting (World Bank, 2024).

In 1995, the United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen set the goal of reducing global poverty by half between 1995 and 2015. This commitment brought poverty alleviation back to the forefront of the agendas of donor agencies and development banks. Despite notable progress in some regions, approximately 1.1 billion people still live in extreme poverty. Consequently, development projects funded by banks and bilateral donors are increasingly expected to demonstrate direct or indirect benefits for these populations. Addressing poverty remains one of the world's most significant challenges.

## **Marginalization of the Manobo**

Comprising approximately 10 to 20 percent of the Philippine's population (109 million), Indigenous Peoples (IPs) are among the poorest and most marginalized, despite living in areas rich in natural resources. They are invisible in official sample surveys and administrative data, making it difficult to obtain a clear picture of their living conditions and socio-economic status. This invisibility silences their voice, hides from the state its responsibility towards them, and locks up their autonomy to assume a more active place in society (Brito et al., 2025). Historical discrimination has limited their access to social services as well as economic and political opportunities. Additionally, the geographic area of many indigenous communities forbids their access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and clean water contributing to their socioeconomic marginalization (World Intellectual Property Organization [WIPO], 2023). Many IPs also face discrimination and prejudice when attempting to access these services. Given that their communities continue to experience deprivation, extreme poverty, discrimination, social unrest, and even violence. The fight for Indigenous peoples' civil rights has been protracted and difficult. These challenges compel Indigenous groups to assert their voices and fight for the recognition and defense of their rights (Hannah & Vanclay, 2013, as cited in Robiego et al., 2022).

The majority of the lawsuits involving Indigenous communities under Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA) are land disputes, raising essential questions on the jurisdiction of the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Hatta (2024) clarifies that while IPRA aims to safeguard the rights of Indigenous peoples and address the historical injustices committed against them, NCIP's power is confined to internal disputes concerning customary practices within a single Indigenous Cultural Community. When non-Indigenous governments or citizens are involved, ordinary courts have jurisdiction over the matter. Hence, IPRA does not grant the NCIP exclusive jurisdiction over all Indigenous claims creating some ambiguity regarding the law's provision on territorial conflicts.

Currently, the Manobo people face numerous challenges in their interactions with other groups. For the Manobo, land is central to life, as their daily existence revolves around their ancestral land and natural resources, including pasture, forests, honey, water, salt-links, wildlife, domestic animals, and wild plants, all of which provide essential food and sustenance (Alferez et al., 2018).

## Cultural, Social, and Political Practices

Culture, or civilization is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individual as a member of society. On the other hand, Spencer-Oatey (2012) describes that culture was a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, ways of thinking, policies and procedures accepted by a group of people to affect their behavior as well as their interpretations of meaning. Culture is therefore a means to learn how to live in a society and it is required rather than inherited. It was derived from one's social movement, not from one's genes. Culture should be distinguished from human nature on the one hand and from an individual's personality on the other, although the boundaries between human nature and culture, as well as between culture and personality, are not always clearly defined.

Education is carried out in ways that reflect a community's cultural traditions of teaching and learning. In its broadest sense, education refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In the book of Zaide (2006) the Philippines, a unique nation, and notes that children in the ancient Philippines were provided with schools. This education was both academic and vocational. The father taught their sons to fight, hunt, and fish, mine the earth for minerals and build ships. Under the mother's tutelage, the daughters learned to cook and do gardening, sewing and home arts. The Manobo people aspire to education and view it as a vital means of improving their living standards through economic, social and cultural advancement (Masendo, 2015). Though they have embedded the value of education, Indigenous Peoples ability to enhance their human capital is still hampered by differences in access to basic services, health outcomes, and education. These disparities hinder their prospects for upward mobility and their ability to escape poverty, according to the World Bank (2024). This demonstrates how structural barriers such as lack of infrastructure, an insufficient number of schools in remote areas, and restricted access to healthcare prevent Indigenous tribes from completely benefiting from education, despite the fact that they see it as a process that transforms their culture.

Tomaquin (2013) stated that the Manobo land is divided into districts, extensive, which were the property of the different clans. According to Garvan (2006), each district was nominally led by warrior chiefs and other influential men. During times of peace, the districts were generally open to all individuals; however, during periods of war which were formerly frequent, only trusted individuals were allowed entry. Each clan typically had a chief, who served as a symbolic ruler, with kinship groups ranging from approximately 20 to 200 members. Manobo society

was entirely patriarchal and authority was exercised only with the consent of the elites, supported by the community, in accordance with customary law.

### 3. Methods

This study utilized the qualitative phenomenological approach to understand and discover the lived experiences of the Manobo participants situated in one context. By employing phenomenology, the study flexibly approached in-depth investigation of how particular experiences are perceived, interpreted, and given meaning by a group of individuals (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Further, Qualitative research enables the identification of the assumptions associated with the phenomenon of the study, facilitates data collection from individuals through in-depth interviews, generates themes based on the data collected, develops descriptions of what the participants experienced, and later reports the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2013). The lived experiences of people living in a poor community framed the research questions. It analyzed availability of government and non-government social services as well as how the services were accessible, functional and reliable. The respondent also explored the dreams and aspirations of Manobo participants, their ambition for self-enhancement or well-being improvement for their shared community.

The research was conducted in Barangay Ilomavis, Kidapawan City, Cotabato among the 40 barangays of the city. Located on the North eastern side of Mount Apo, it is bordered to the south by Barangay Ginatilan and Magpet Purok Kisandal, to the east and to the west by Barangay Sikitan. It is interesting to note that the 66.75% of the population in Barangay Ilomavis were Obo Manobo, which primarily lived at Purok 3 and 4 (City Planning and Development Office of Kidapawan City, 2023). This unique focus of Obo Manobo tribes in the barangay made it a purposive and significant decision for the study.

For the credibility of the data, eight (8) Manobo informants were purposely selected from Purok 3 and 4 Barangay Ilomavis, Kidapawan City, Cotabato. These participants were true residents and members of the Manobo tribe who were 18 years old and above. They were asked to sign an informed consent form, making their participation voluntary and indicating the understanding of the purpose of the study. This recruitment method, based on narrow inclusion criteria and informed consent, ensured well-informed participants and the reliability and authenticity of collected data. Phenomenological studies typically involve small, purposively selected samples to allow in-depth exploration of lived experiences (Creswell et al., 2013).

The primary data collection instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide. Semi-structured interviews are widely used to collect data through individual sessions with participants using open-ended questions to explore the lived experiences of Manobo people while allowing flexibility in responses (Bazen et al., 2021). The interview guide was subjected to expert validation to ensure clarity and relevance of the questions. The questions were clustered into three themes: (1) participants lived experiences, (2) their perceptions of government service delivery, and (3) their aspirations as members of the Manobo community.

A written request to undertake the study was submitted to the Punong Barangay of Ilomavis. In compliance with ethical standards, a separate letter of approval was also secured from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) before conducting the study, in recognition of the involvement of members of an indigenous community. After obtaining approval, the participants were informed about the research and they signed a consent form. They were told that they could skip any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. The interview guide was followed, and the interviews were recorded. In addition, the confidentiality of the data collected was guaranteed by the researchers.

Interviews were also carried out in the participants' language of choice (mainly Cebuano) to facilitate an in-depth conversation about their experiences. When necessary, a participant who was fluent in both Manobo and Cebuano interpreted responses into Cebuano on the spot during the interview. The translator and original respondent articulated their dual roles very well, and both provided informed consent prior to the discussion. They affirmed that their participation was voluntary, and they understood the ethical responsibilities related to confidentiality. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed directly in Cebuano, maintaining the data's authenticity. Afterward, the Cebuano transcribed data were translated to English for the analysis and reporting under sets of cross-cultural phenomenological research criteria (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This process provided a way to ensure accuracy of meaning, leaving voice to the participant (general audience) and access to researchers (academics).

This study employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a commonly used approach for analyzing rich qualitative data. The modified Van Kaam method developed by Moustakas (1994) was applied. It involves systematic stages including horizontalization, low- and high-level data elimination, clustering and thematizing of data, validation of the prefigured clusters/themes, production of textural and structural descriptions, as well as theme development ensures

thorough and accurate examination of what participants experience along with harvesting explicating strategies used to have meaning during navigation.

#### **4. Result and Discussion**

A wide spectrum of indigenous peoples' individual and collective rights are covered by the IPRA and ILO Convention 169. The core of both instruments is the recognition and defense of the territorial, self-governance, and cultural rights in accordance with the IPs values of equality and nondiscrimination (Doyle, 2019). Despite these legal protections, the Manobo community continues to face significant challenges. There were multiple themes identified from the analysis of participants' interviews, which pertained to social services and experiences from vulnerable groups. A subject of social invisibility emerged, and this finding revealed the systematic marginalization and being regarded as a 'nobody' by Manobo participants. This invisibility takes many shapes, including access to healthcare, financial hardship, educational disadvantage and even food poverty. Participants articulated their dependence on both government and non-government social services, while also detailing the barriers and availability of these services.

Financial stability was identified as a major concern, particularly the difficulty of securing stable employment and meeting basic needs. Most of them worked as laborers at the geothermal plant of EDC in Sorsogon Leyte where that led to and left their family with financial difficulties. The participants mentioned the effect of disasters including earthquakes on their livelihood and housing as well.

Access to healthcare was a primary concern that materialized among the participants, who just could not find medications or any available healthcare service. They faced challenges in accessing medical care due to lack of availability of medicines and the need to go across barangays or into city centers for their healthcare.

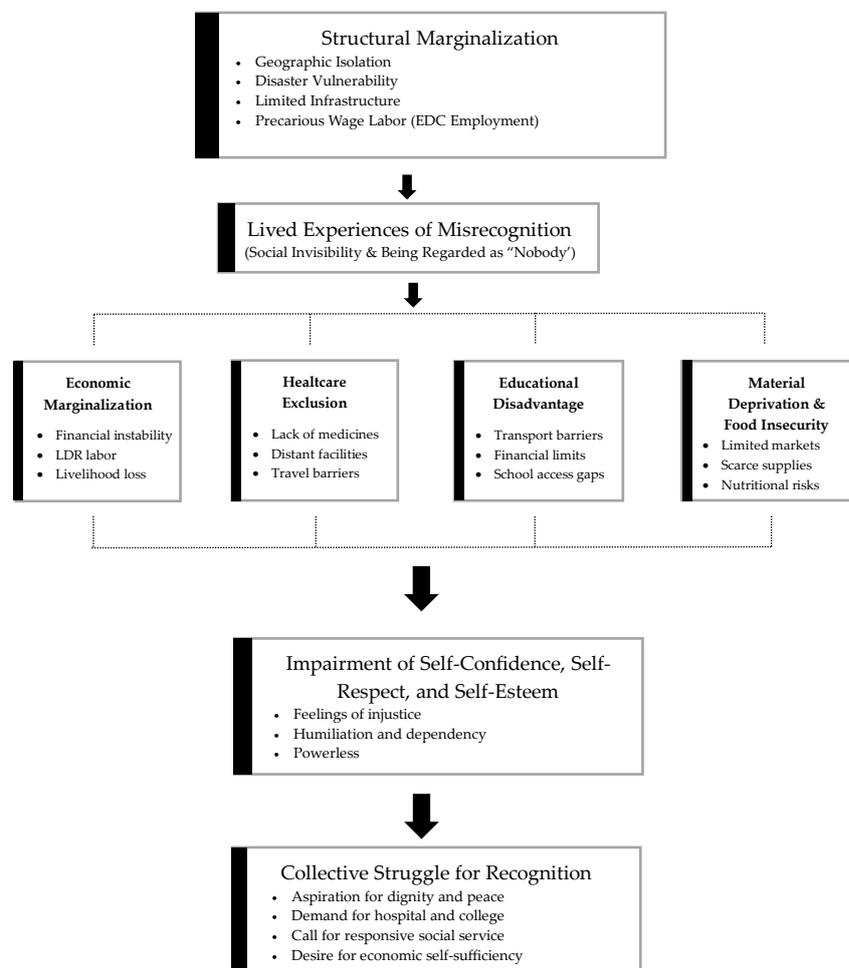
Barriers to education were also commonly mentioned by participants, citing transportation access and financial difficulties in accessing education. Food insecurity was also prevalent, stemming from limited access to local markets and limited food supplies, amounting to challenges in fulfilling basic nutritional requirements.

Despite these adversities, the participants expressed strong personal and collective aspirations. They emphasized their hopes for peace, good health, education and economic prosperity. Infrastructure issues like development of

college, hospital for community progression and welfare were also stressed by them.

To integrate and illustrate the emergent themes, a conceptual integration of the lived experiences of the Manobo participants is presented below. Grounded in Honneth’s Theory of the Struggle for Recognition, this model elucidates how structural marginalization gives rise to experiences of misrecognition in the form of economic instability, exclusion from health care, lack of educational opportunity, and food insecurity. This layered exclusion negatively affects motivation, self-worth and well-being due to experiences of injustice and invisibility. In answer to these conditions, participants express desires and social claims that are in line with their continuing fight for recognition and social inclusion.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Integration of Lived Experiences of Misrecognition among the Manobo Tribe**



Source: Developed by the researcher based on Honneth’s (1995) Theory of the Struggle for Recognition.

## 5. Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of the participants during the interviews brought significant realizations on the life of marginalized sectors, particularly the Obo Manobo residents in Barangay Ilomavis. The analysis of data produced three major themes: social invisibility, perceptions of social services and hopes and aspirations. Together, these themes highlight the community's economic hardships, lack of basic social services and perception in society to hope for improvement.

The first theme, social Invisibility, describes the systematic exclusion and erasure that the Manobo participants had to endure. Their narratives reveal the bitter truths of livelihood and economic difficulties, aggravated by geographic and infrastructural constraints. The participants express their difficulties in accessing health, education and food underlining the widespread socio-economic limitations that affects their fundamental human rights. In addition, the feeling of being neglected and dismissed as inferior due to their rural backgrounds worsens their feelings of exclusion and the importance of gaining recognition and affirmation for their experiences.

The second category, perceptions of social services, explores how people perceived the delivery of services by government and non-government agencies. While they acknowledged the efforts of various actors in providing support, they emphasized the persistent limitation and barriers to access essential services like healthcare and education. Although disaster relief and housing assistance were recognized, structural barriers and insufficient resources prevent them from breaking the cycle. This issue underlines the need for more effective and appropriate context interventions to their specific needs.

Finally, the theme hopes aims reflects the hopes and dreams of what participants want to achieve in their own environment and lives. Their aspirations of health and schooling, and financial security signify a desire for social and economic advancement. Many expressed a collective goal of improving infrastructure like schools and hospitals, indicating a desire to grow their community. These aspirations demonstrate strength and determination born out of adversity, revealing an unwavering dedication to build a brighter future for themselves or others.

## 6. Recommendation

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that LGU should focus on essential infrastructures problems such as the urgent need of some facilities at Ilomavis particularly in education and health-care based on the perceptions of community constituents. This effort can be done by partnering with CHED for the establishment of a college or satellite campus, and collaborating with DOH for the creation of a health center or district hospital; identifying appropriate funding allocations through provincial or congressional initiatives and incorporating IP development issues in the Local Development Plan. NGOs are welcome to support these efforts by offering scholarships, educational materials and above all, healthcare services such as community outreach or strengthening the capacity of local health volunteers. The Barangay Council of Ilomavis must proactively advocate for these projects at the city and provincial levels by passing resolutions to support proposed infrastructure, mobilizing community mobilization, lobbying indigenous leaders, and providing an oversight mechanism to check on progress. The City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) should also consider conducting a sectorial study to address education, health and social welfare services rendered to Manobo families for the development of responsive programs based on the specific needs. Subsequent investigation could improve upon this study by updating and triangulating data with qualitative methods that employ indigenous participation, to document the consistent structural reasons affecting access to education and healthcare, including environmental issues, along with ancestral domain interest. Through the implementation of these recommendations, stakeholders can collectively help alleviate the dire systemic issues experienced by the Manobo people, sustainably develop and include social disparities while upholding indigenous rights in a way that would offer valuable contributions to environmental sociology and indigenous studies.

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