



HISTORY AND CULTURAL INNOVATION (HCI)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 (2024)



**PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA**

Indigenization in the Local Legislature: Probing the Indigenous People's Mandatory Representation in Ilocos Region

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Article Information

Received: July 11, 2024

Accepted: August 07, 2024

Published: August 10, 2024

Keywords

*Indigenous People's Mandatory
Representatives, Public
Administrations*

ABSTRACT

One cannot talk about society without discussing its people cumulatively builds up the population. However, equality has always been a difficult idea to attain. This multi-method approach in qualitative inquiry study entitled "indigenization in the local legislature: probing the indigenous people's mandatory representation in ilocos region" aims to shed light on the current challenges, conditions, and issues experienced by ethnic groups in terms of political representation. A total of six participants mostly from the high-land ethnic groups of Region One were interviewed through the use of the semi-structured type wherein the gathered data was subjected to thematic analysis that yielded the following themes: Political experience in the realms of the IP community, Socio-cultural belongingness and identity and Political Burned out. Results discussed that despite the ongoing issue of discrimination-isolation against indigenous people. The implementation of Indigenous People Mandatory Representation of IPRA 1997 has somehow produced positive results in alleviating the identity of ethnic groups in the Philippines thus shifting the societal perspective towards ethnic minorities.

INTRODUCTION

The recognition and defense of the rights of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) have been ongoing for years, facing significant challenges due to government neglect and armed conflicts. Indigenous Peoples have suffered as internally displaced persons (IDPs), and some have been falsely accused, imprisoned, or tortured as suspected members of opposition groups. This context underscores the importance of involving IPs in local legislatures to fully exercise their rights and alter their political participation, thus addressing the long-standing issue of misrepresentation. Public Administration, as a discipline, recognizes the critical need for a cultural interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to foster understanding and collaboration.

Indigenous Peoples possess unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment, maintaining distinct social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics. Despite these differences, Indigenous Peoples globally face common issues in protecting their rights as distinct peoples. Indigenous communities are spread across continents, including the Arctic, Pacific, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. There is no universally accepted definition of Indigenous Peoples under international law, as the right of self-identification is fundamental to their right to self-determination.

Over the years, Indigenous Peoples have sought recognition for their identities, lifestyles, and rights to traditional lands, territories, and natural resources. However, their rights have consistently been violated. Addressing the welfare and development of Indigenous

Peoples requires a holistic approach, encompassing culture, health, economy, education, peace, and political participation. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which protects their rights to collective bio-cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, resources, territories, cultural and spiritual values, and customary laws.

Representation and participation of Indigenous Peoples in the legislature remain significant issues. Despite their growing numbers, Indigenous Peoples are underrepresented in municipal and national governments. For example, in Latin America, countries like Bolivia have introduced mechanisms for direct representation, securing seats in the national parliament for Indigenous Peoples, providing valuable lessons on the effective representation of Indigenous Peoples in governance. However, there is still a lack of significant change in Indigenous presence in national legislatures across Latin America, with Bolivia being a notable exception. The absence of greater Indigenous representation in countries with significant Indigenous populations, such as Guatemala and Mexico, highlights this issue. The historical and ongoing marginalization of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes has limited their ability to advocate for their rights and interests.

Moreover, Indigenous Peoples with disabilities face unique challenges within local legislative councils, often being invisible in discussions around disability legislation and identity, further marginalizing them. Recognizing and protecting Indigenous Peoples' rights has been a long-standing struggle, despite several international policies aimed at addressing these issues. A World Bank Report

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in 2017 identified the need for more inclusive growth, particularly in Asia, highlighting the ongoing challenge of achieving inclusion for Indigenous Peoples.

In the Philippines, despite the provisions of Republic Act 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the government, particularly in the legislature, remains challenging. Factors such as lack of support from Local Government Units (LGUs), limited resources, and inadequate training hinder the effective discharge of their functions. Therefore, the need for LGUs to comply with the mandates of RA 8371 is crucial for supporting Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in performing their duties.

Currently, there is limited literature on the lived experiences of IPMRs, particularly in the provinces of La Union and Ilocos Sur. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the status, challenges, and trajectories of IPMRs in these regions, providing valuable insights into their representation in local governance. Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives in fulfilling their mandates under Section 16 of Republic Act 8371, probing their status, challenges, and trajectories. The central question driving this research is: How do Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives live up to the mandates of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review on Indigenous Peoples (IPs) highlights several critical themes in both global and Philippine contexts, examining the frameworks, challenges, and ongoing efforts related to IP rights and development. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a pivotal document that underscores the international community's acknowledgment of IPs as distinct communities with inherent rights to their ancestral lands and self-determination. UNDRIP emphasizes the autonomy of IPs in defining their identity, which serves as a foundation for various national policies and frameworks aimed at protecting IP rights (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – United South & Eastern Tribes, 2021). In the Philippines, IPs represent a significant demographic, with 14-17 million people across 110 ethnolinguistic groups primarily situated in Northern Luzon and Mindanao (Indigenous Peoples, n.d.). The 1987 Philippine Constitution and Republic Act 8371, also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), are critical legal instruments that institutionalize the rights of IPs. These include the management of ancestral domains and the preservation of cultural heritage (Department of Interior and Local Government-Legal Opinions, 2014; Villanueva *et al.*, 2017). Despite the existence of robust legal frameworks, IPs in the Philippines continue to encounter significant challenges. These include systemic discrimination, ongoing land disputes, and economic marginalization (Indigenous Peoples and the United

Nations Human Rights System, n.d.). These issues highlight the gap between legal protections and their actual implementation on the ground. The implementation of IPRA has led to some notable progress. It has empowered IPs by enhancing their participation in governance and promoting their involvement in development initiatives. This empowerment is crucial for fostering self-determination and ensuring that IPs have a voice in matters affecting their communities (Villanueva *et al.*, 2017). Despite these advances, challenges in the practical implementation of IPRA persist.

There are issues related to the representation of IPs within local governments, which can hinder the effective enforcement of their rights and the realization of their development goals. This underscores the need for continued efforts to bridge the gap between policy and practice (Paul & Roth, 2023). Efforts to improve IP participation and protect their cultural heritage are ongoing. These efforts are crucial in the face of socio-economic pressures and the impacts of various policies. Initiatives aimed at conserving cultural heritage and promoting self-determination, such as the Salween Peace Park initiative for the Indigenous Karen community, serve as examples of how IPs are actively working towards sustainable development and cultural preservation (Heath *et al.*, 2022; Paul & Roth, 2023). In summary, while significant strides have been made in recognizing and institutionalizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples both internationally and in the Philippines, persistent challenges remain. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes effective policy implementation, enhanced representation, and ongoing efforts to protect and promote IPs' cultural heritage and self-determination.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a descriptive approach in qualitative inquiry, utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in local legislatures. Conducted in the Ilocos Region, this research focuses on municipalities with IPMRs who serve as ex-officio members of the Sangguian Bayan under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), or RA 8371. The Ilocos Region, a melting pot of cultures and traditions, provides a diverse yet marginalized group of indigenous peoples. The study identifies six participants using purposive sampling, ensuring they possess the characteristics necessary for the research.

The data collection involves developing interview questions through the Interview Development Guide (IDG), validated internally, and conducting one-on-one interviews to gather pertinent information. The interviews follow a structured process, employing Castillo Montoya's (2016) four phases of Interview Protocol Refinement to ensure alignment with research objectives, construct inquiry-based questions, receive feedback, and pilot the interview protocol.

To facilitate the step-by-step analysis of the collected data, the study uses the seven steps of IPA. This process involves carefully reading and re-reading data, noting significant responses, categorizing these responses into emergent themes, and further analyzing them to determine sub-themes. These sub-themes are then grouped into main themes, leading to a comprehensive narrative and the development of “A Comprehensive Indigenous People’s Mandatory Representatives in Local Legislature Model in Ilocos Region.” The researchers validate findings through participant feedback and triangulate responses and documents to ensure accuracy. Rigor and trustworthiness in this qualitative study are maintained by considering credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation is used to gather multiple data sources, and IPMRs review written versions of their answers for accuracy. Transferability is addressed by identifying similarities between situations, while dependability is established through trial interviews. Confirmability is achieved through careful documentation of research steps. Honesty, fairness, authenticity, and validity are prioritized, with all information secured and verified by respondents.

Ethical considerations include adhering to the SLC Guidelines on Research Ethics, ensuring proper coordination, and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Consent letters are obtained, and interviews are recorded with permission. Scholarly treatment of data avoids biases, and proper referencing upholds copyright laws, with the Turnitin application used to prevent plagiarism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion on the lived experiences of the Indigenous People Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) in the Ilocos Region, highlighting the themes and sub-themes identified through thematic analysis. The analysis yielded three main themes: Political Experiences in the Realms of the IP Community, Socio-cultural Belongingness and Identity, and Political Burnout.

Political Experiences in the Realms of the IP Community

This theme encompasses the participants’ journey before, during, and after becoming IPMRs, including their performance, participation in municipal politics, and plans. Participants were initially appointed as heads of their communities before being selected as IPMRs. Some were appointed through voluntary service without monetary compensation, and selection processes varied, involving voting or appointment by the barangay captain. Participant 1 shared his experiences prior to becoming an IPMR, stating, “Before nga nagbalin nga NCIP. Ket idi tiempo na. During that time, isu ta napanak nga Barangay IPMR, kasalukuyanak idi nga Barangay council. Ngem jay paglintegan gamin. Agresign da amin nga akemmo nga gobyerno bagom nga before nga tang tanggapem iti IPMR.” Participant 2 highlighted another term for IPMR,

saying, “Ay kwa metlang, siak metlang ti, sakbay nga nagbalin nga IPMR gamin, Chieftain ti awag kanyami.” These narratives illustrate the transition from chieftain roles to IPMRs and the associated challenges, including lack of monetary compensation and the need to resign from other government positions.

Municipal IPMRs, the highest governing position for ethnic groups in a municipality, were selected from barangay IPMRs through various processes, including nomination and self-nomination. The mandatory representation in local legislative councils and policy-making bodies provided IPMRs with privileges similar to regular members, but challenges persisted. As Participant 1 narrated, “Jay damo, through nomination. Sakbay kami nageselect, ngem adda metlang jay paglentegan nga you can also nominate yourself. So, inkwak metlang ti bagik.” Participant 5 further contextualized, “We undergo a process of selection idi, pero may ano rin, freedom to nominate ourselves despite of selection.”

Socio-Cultural Belongingness and Identity

This theme illuminates the challenges faced by indigenous people within local society and culture. Participants shared experiences of stereotyping, discrimination, and being mistaken for terrorists due to their indigenous identity. Participant 2 articulated this through the lens of residency, “Gappo ngarod ta iti gamin ip kasla gamin awag da ti IP naggappo ti kabanbantayan.” Participant 4 highlighted the prevalent notion that being indigenous often leads to stereotyping, “Meron kasi yung notion na kapag IP ka, taga-bundok ka, awan ammom. Kumbaga, meron pa yung sasabihan kami na hindi kami nakakaintindi ng salita sa baba.” Participant 5 shared adverse experiences of being mistakenly associated with terrorism, “Ito sabihin ko lang sir, pangit yung minsan pinagkakamalan kaming terorista kasi galing kami sa bundok kaya nahihirapan kaming i-ano ung representasyon na pinaglalaman namin.” Despite legal provisions, socio-cultural challenges continue to hinder the development of the IP community. Discriminatory isolation reveals how stereotypes related to cultural, physical, and linguistic differences lead to exclusion from political participation and broader community activities. Participant 2 narrated encounters with discrimination, “Gappo latta ti diskriminasyon, kasla ngay maipapaigid da lattan, kasla nga nababbaba ti kalidad ti IP.” Participant 6 reflected on linguistic diversity, acknowledging, “We have a different dialect among the others, and we acknowledge that. Kaso, kahit anong gawin namin minsan during the sessions, nadidiscriminate parin kami, the usual sinasabi ng mga tao na wala kaming pinag-aralan.”

Political Burnout

This theme delineates the multifaceted impact of the implementation of the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, highlighting both positive strides and ongoing challenges. Economic marginalization emerged as a significant concern, with inadequate compensation

and support for IPMRs. Participant 1 vividly expressed his sentiments, recounting a determined fight against corruption and an insistence on fair compensation: “Six months ko nga per session lang ti kwak idi ngem inlaban mi, gappo ta dagijay kadwak idi ayanti sanguniang bayan idi ket, kadwak metlang ti tribo then inlaban mi nga, I myself, mareceive ko met jay kasla jay aw awaten da, ngamin I am not an ex officio only, it is a fixed mandatory, nakakabil ijay, haan nga ex officio lang.” Participant 2 revealed the challenges faced, emphasizing the need for more substantial support: “Nga manmano lang ti makammo, ta dagijayen nga pagsay atan nga dagijay, maipakammo aminen kin adda gamin idi NCIP ket adda gayam ti scholarship program da ket haan nga kwa, haan nga maam maamwan ti amin nga kasla ngay nu meeting ti barangay ket haanda met nga ayaban iti chieftain idi nga agsao ijay, ngem idi nagbalin nga IPMR ket addan ti part na ijay nga agsao.”

Despite these challenges, the implementation of IPRA facilitated livelihood assistance and recognition for indigenous groups, contributing to municipal economies through unique products. Participants highlighted specific benefits, such as financial support for local industries and increased recognition of indigenous products, which positively impacted tourism and community development. Participant 1 cited benefits, such as financial support for bamboo wrap and soft broom making, contributing to the economic growth of San Gabriel, recognized as the “soft broom capital of the north.” Participant 3 highlighted LGU support for showcasing indigenous products, and Participant 6 emphasized the positive impact on tourism due to the diverse products offered by indigenous communities.

In summary, the findings reveal the complex interplay between challenges and positive outcomes in IP representation, emphasizing the ongoing efforts to address historical injustices while fostering economic and cultural growth. section may each be divided by subheadings or may be combined. A combined Results and Discussion section is often appropriate. This should explore the significance of the results of the work, don't repeat them. Avoid extensive citations and discussion of published literature only; instead discuss recent literature for comparing your work to highlight the novelty of the work in view of recent development and challenges in the field.

CONCLUSION

This study has delved into the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples' Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs), focusing on their roles and challenges under Republic Act 8371, the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA). Utilizing a multimethod qualitative approach, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research was conducted in La Union and Ilocos Sur provinces. Through one-on-one interviews

and thematic analysis, several critical insights emerged. The political journeys of IPMRs were diverse, influenced by historical roles evolving from community chieftains to legislative representatives. Despite their formal inclusion in local governance structures, IPMRs face substantial challenges, notably inadequate financial compensation and persistent obstacles hindering their effective participation. These challenges underscore the gaps in legislative support and the need for enhanced institutional mechanisms to support IPMRs in fulfilling their mandates effectively. Socio-cultural belongingness emerged as a significant theme, highlighting the ongoing discrimination and isolation faced by IPs within local society. The study calls for comprehensive measures beyond legislation to address these issues, advocating for equitable compensation, dismantling discriminatory biases, and fostering an inclusive environment for IPs in political processes. Moving forward, there is a clear imperative for comprehensive reforms to ensure the active and meaningful participation of IPs in governance. Recommendations include adopting the “Ti Saripda ti High-landers model” for continuous defense of IP representation, securing sufficient budget allocations for IPMRs, and providing regular training programs to enhance their legislative skills. Coordination between the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and local governments is essential to align policies and improve representation frameworks. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the urgent need for sustained efforts to overcome barriers and empower Indigenous Peoples in shaping their destinies and contributing meaningfully to societal progress. It calls for ongoing research and advocacy to advance the rights and representation of IPs within the political landscape, ensuring their voices are heard and respected..

Acknowledgments

The successful completion of this academic pursuit is attributed to the collective efforts and contributions of numerous individuals and institutions. Foremost, gratitude is extended to the Heavenly Father for His blessings and grace. Special recognition goes to Mr. Christopher F. Maynes, the thesis adviser, for his patience, expert guidance, and unwavering support. The panel members—Mr. Ramon B. Torres, Ms. Hannah C. Picpican, Mr. Darel V. Mananquil, and Maria Rosalinda M. Lacsamana—deserve appreciation for their thorough review and insightful recommendations. Notably, Hon. Herald P. Ubungen, SK Chairperson of Barangay Bumbuneg, San Gabriel La Union, played a pivotal role, generously contributing time, efforts, and resources during the data gathering process, which significantly enriched the study. Special thanks also to Mrs. Evangeline P. Ubungen, pioneer IPMR of San Gabriel, La Union, and others who provided assistance, technical support, and encouragement throughout this research journey.

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