

NARRATIVES OF KALAGAN WOMEN ON LIFE'S CHALLENGING JOURNEY AND ASPIRATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous people, such as the Kalagan, have their own stories, including how they struggle in society being members of a minority group. This study aims to describe, in retrospect, life's challenging journey and the aspirations of Kalagan women in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur. It employed a descriptive phenomenological qualitative design. Twelve Kalagan women willingly participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs). The findings reveal that poverty, naivete, and discrimination are their life's challenges. As regards their aspirations for their tribe, two themes emerged: they long to be accorded respect by other people, and they are concerned with their children's academic and professional success. The challenges they have experienced have driven them to strive harder and motivated them to educate their children to improve their life situation. Moreover, their life's challenging journey has also called upon the local government and other relevant government agencies to look deeper into the needs of the Kalagan and provide faster, more efficient, and quality basic services.

Keywords: *social science; indigenous people; Kalagan; narratives; phenomenology; Philippines*



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INTRODUCTION

The struggles of indigenous peoples (IPs) have several times been reported, including among others the issues of poverty (Hunter, 2020; Jamieson, 1999; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994; Ross & Mikdalauskas, 2018), poor access to education and literacy (Sada et al., 2019), forest degradation (Gabriel et al., 2020), land-related disputes (Gaspar, 2015), and marginalization (Jamieson, 1999; Lontoc, 2020; Phuong, 2017). The IPs, classified as minority groups, have been underprivileged in many circumstances worldwide. There have been reports of poverty as very much apparent in Latin America (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994), Australia (Hunter, 2020; Ross & Mikdalauskas, 2018), and Nicaragua (Jamieson, 1999). In Australia, IPs have limited access to disability services (Phuong, 2017). In the Asian context, IPs have likewise been at a disadvantage in many aspects, one being poor access to technology (Sada et al., 2019). In the Philippines, some of the concerns of the IPs involve poor access to education, resources, and livelihood (Gabriel et al., 2020), marginalization among the Aeta women (Lontoc, 2020), and displacement among the Manobo, and the Blaan in Jose Abad Santos, Davao Occidental in Mindanao (Gaspar, 2015). Other tribes that have similar struggles have gone unreported.

From the various literature on abuses committed against IPs, it was revealed that it is the women who suffer the most. For many years, there have been reported cases of crimes and abuses against indigenous women. These include the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) (Ficklin et al., 2022), persistent and significant stressful life events (SLE) (Paine et al., 2022), victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Wands & Mirzoev, 2022), and mistreatment due to cultural and linguistic barriers and prejudices (Gleason et al., 2022). Several actions and programs were initiated to help IPs, including granting them legal recognition and political empowerment as part of the realization of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda (Buenavista et al., 2018), education and literacy in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Sada et al., 2019), and the offering of Vocational Education and Training (VET) program (Orbeta, 2022). Thus, various forms of support, according to the needs of indigenous communities, were extended to help improve their living condition.

This paper looked into the challenging journey of the Kalagan Indigenous Group of Hagonoy, Davao del Sur from the perspective of the Kalagan women. The Kalagan is a group of IPs residing in the Gulf of Davao (Echavez, 2000). The early history of the tribe can be traced back to 1860 when a certain group of Paugok, presumably belonging to the Tagakaulo tribe, waged war against the Bagobos who were settled in the Digos and Daliao areas. Paugok's men were known as brave and skilled warriors enabling them to occupy the areas between the Padada and Balutakay rivers (Cole, 1919), which are now part of the municipalities of Padada and Hagonoy, Davao del Sur. The group of Paugok was later called the Kagan or Kalagan. Today, the Kalagan tribe continues to occupy the same areas, which have been transformed into villages of barangays, such as Leling and Guihing (Asa & Wendel, 2002). Based

on the 2020 records of the Municipality of Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, the Kalagan account for nearly half of its total population of 8,068.

The findings of this study seek to explain how the Kalagan women view their historical background, highlighting their struggles and those of their ancestors. These findings hope to contribute to the body of knowledge on the Kalagan tribe, one of the country's poorly studied indigenous groups. This paper also presents the aspirations of the Kalagan tribe from the perspective of its female members. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help initiate appropriate forms of support and programs to alleviate the plight of the Kalagan tribe.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Challenges encountered by the Indigenous Peoples

The IPs have always been at a disadvantage and marginalized, especially concerning livelihood opportunities, access to education and literacy, and forest- and land-related disputes. There are approximately 370 million IPs in more than 90 countries; they account for 15% of the poorest in the world (UNESCO, 2019). Available literature reveals that poverty is one of the many challenges confronting IPs (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Hall & Patrinos, 2012) worldwide. It is reported as a dominant problem among the indigenous groups in Latin America (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994), the Australian indigenous community (Hunter, 2020; Ross & Mikalauskas, 2018), and Nicaragua (Jamieson, 1999). Poverty is associated with several factors. In the case of IPs in Latin America, poverty is correlated with the lack of educational achievement (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994). In the indigenous Australian context, poverty is linked with the absence of wealth inherited from ancestors (Hunter, 2020), and unemployment (Ross & Mikalauskas, 2018). The incidence of poverty is likewise associated with other indigenous concerns such as limitations on the following: credit opportunity, medical care, schooling, housing privilege, and occupational opportunity (Jamieson, 1999). Hence, addressing the factors mentioned above is deemed imperative to help alleviate the poverty experienced by indigenous groups.

As earlier mentioned, the IPs are also the most disadvantaged in terms of access to education. Since most of them live in remote areas, very few gain admission to schools. In this modern age, education and literacy in ICT are crucial to the improvement of any community (Sada et al., 2019). It is in the area of ICT literacy where the IPs are almost totally behind. For instance, a study on Dayak, the indigenous group on the island of Borneo in Indonesia, revealed that they are disadvantaged and “less competitive in technology advancement,” and in obtaining a proper job. They have limited prospects to engage in business, have poor access to education, and have become less competitive in the political arena. (Sada et al., 2019). However, with the free basic education offered by the governments and schools in remote areas, IP children are increasingly gaining access to education.

Apart from poverty which stands out as the most prevailing challenge for the IPs coupled with their lack of education, they also suffer from being deprived of their ancestral land. Many of them believe that the destruction of the environment is the beginning of their misery. Forest destruction has been well-documented (Anzualdo et al., 2022; Gabay & Apaza, 2022; Kleemann et al., 2022; Smith & Dressler, 2020). Consequently, it has also been the main cause of the difficulties and sufferings experienced by the IPs because the destruction of the forest destroys their primary source of livelihood.

As a consequence of losing their lands, the IPs are pushed, both physically and socially, away from the mainstream. Many of them have gone up to the mountains in search of other sources of livelihood, having lost their lands to immigrants.

Moreover, the IPs are considered among the marginalized groups who have suffered from alienation and neglect (Comberti et al., 2019; Zentner et al., 2019). Examples of these are the IPs in Australia who have suffered from insufficient opportunities to access services needed by persons with disability (Phuong, 2017), and the IPs in Nicaragua who have struggled with limited access to various public services (Jamieson, 1999). Not only do the IPs struggle to win back their rights and/or possessions, but they also struggle to regain their lives back. Just like the rest of society, they too deserve a better life; a life free from poverty, with access to education, endowed with the right to ownership and access to their ancestral lands, and accorded respect and acceptance in the community.

Struggles of the Indigenous People in the Philippines

The IPs in the Philippines have shared similar situations with their counterparts worldwide. As livelihood opportunities become rare for them, they also struggle in poverty (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Royo et al., 2022), suffer from the destruction of the forest (Avanceña, 2018; Pineda-Ofreneo, 2019), and continue to fight for their ancestral lands (Imbong, 2021; Molintas, 2004), which are more visible in their resistance to mining (Holden, 2013; McGovern, 2022; Simbulan, 2016). Their efforts to alleviate their plight, even with the help of the government and other agencies, have been like an uphill battle. In Nueva Ecija, for example, women from two ethnic groups shared concerns about the preservation of forests because they had insufficient opportunities for resources, education, and livelihood (Gabriel et al., 2020). They continue to fight to regain their land. In Mindanao, particularly in Jose Abad Santos, Davao Occidental, the Manobo, and Blaan have suffered from dislocation, and continue their battle to procure titles for their ancestral land (Gaspar, 2015).

IPs in the Philippines, particularly the Aeta women (Lontoc, 2020) and those affected by large-scale mining have also been marginalized (McGovern, 2022). Their remote location added to the fact that the services of the government hardly reach their areas. Moreover, the IPs in the Philippines are vulnerable to armed conflicts between the rebels and the government (Candelaria, 2018). The Kalagan had their share of

the sufferings of other indigenous groups, although theirs is different as they are mostly situated in the lowland. But their experience of poverty and destitution is a reality, even if they live with non-natives in the lowlands where there are supposed to be more and better opportunities

To support the IPs in the country, the Philippine government has recognized their importance as manifested in the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 which recognizes, protects, and promotes the rights of indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples. Despite this law and the programs undertaken by the government through the National Council for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), there remains much to be done to integrate the IPs into the mainstream, particularly in terms of access to basic social services and livelihood opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design, emphasizing the lived experiences of the Kalagan women as they shared the challenges they experienced and their aspirations. According to Giorgi and Giorgi (2003, p. 180), "With descriptive approaches, one tries to describe the experiences being lived through very carefully and once the raw data has been obtained, a thorough phenomenological psychological analysis of the data takes place within the perspective of the phenomenological psychological reduction." The researchers, therefore, carefully described the experiences of the Kalagan women respondents as narrated with consistency to give an account of the phenomenon.

Study Participants

Twelve (12) Kalagan women participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs). Kalagan mothers who were residents of the Municipality of Hagonoy Davao del Sur and aged 40 years old and above, were particularly selected, considering they had a rich experience about the phenomenon being studied, specifically about their life struggles in the past as Kalagan. The researchers conducted the study in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, and used interview guide questions to gather data.

Data Collection

The two (2) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) served as the main sources of data. Since it is important for the data collection process that the participants are comfortable, the researchers agreed to hold the FGDs in the venues preferred by the Kalagan women participants. The first FGD was held at the house of the tribal chieftain. The second was conducted at the Tribal Hall. The purpose of the second FGD was to validate the findings of the first FGD. Since the researchers did not speak nor understand the Kalagan language, they used Cebuano, the local language that all the participants spoke and understood. The researchers, thus, did not have to get an

interpreter. The use of Cebuano added to a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere during the conduct of the FGD. The researchers also asked the participants' permission to do an audio recording of the activity to facilitate the preparation of the transcripts of the proceedings, which were later used in the analysis of data.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The authors employed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method in analyzing qualitative data. First, they read and re-read each transcript to gain a deeper understanding of the responses from the FGDs. Next, they extracted significant statements from the transcripts. Thereafter, they formulated meanings for each significant statement. Then, they sorted the formulated meanings into clusters of themes and emerging themes. As a fifth step, they wrote the findings using the emerging themes to provide an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. After this, they checked the fundamental structure of the phenomenon to determine possible duplications or remove similar themes. Finally, they subjected the initial results of their data analysis to a second FGD where the participants were asked to validate the findings against their actual experiences and views as Kalagan women.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings of the study using qualitative research, the research team strictly observed trustworthiness following the criteria suggested by Guba (1981): Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability.

Credibility. The authors followed the process of reflecting, sifting, exploring, judging the meaning, and expounding on the themes to describe the phenomenon of the study (Moustakas, 1990). Their experiences in teaching and doing qualitative research added to the study's credibility. They also subjected the study findings for review or debriefing by the evaluators of the National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP) as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Transferability. The researchers provided a thick description of the phenomenon of the Kalagan women for the readers and future researchers to have a vivid view of how the study was conducted so that it can be replicated or contextualized in other similar settings.

Dependability. The researchers provided verbatim responses in each theme to add credibility to the data. The raw data was kept intact and an audit trail was established to help trace the journey in treating and analyzing the data.

Confirmability. The authors ensured a consistent and objective approach in analyzing and presenting the findings. They focused on the data and described the phenomenon, following the protocols of a descriptive phenomenological qualitative inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers observed the ethical standards in conducting qualitative research. They first requested permission from the National Council for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to undertake the study on the Kalagan of Hagonoy, Davao del Sur. In response to this, they received written permission from the NCIP Provincial Director. They also obtained the approval of the Kalagan Chieftain who was very supportive of the project. Aside from the permissions from NCIP and the Kalagan Chieftain, the researchers obtained the informed consent of each of the participants. All of them agreed to participate and signed the Informed Consent Form. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names and other identifiers of the participants were not revealed in the report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on the challenges and aspirations that were shared by the Kalagan women.

Kalagan Women's Life's Challenges

When the Kalagan women were asked about the challenges that they experienced in the past, the following themes were revealed: poverty, naivete, and discrimination.

Poverty. They experienced scarcity of food because they lived in forested areas that were not fit for rice farming. What is worse is that their location lacked proper drainage causing floods during heavy rainfall. One participant shared,

"Kuan paman gud ning areaha diri kanang nagsilbing lasang pa. Niya wala pajud kanang huyong huyong gani mam. Niya wala pa na siyay drainage diha o. Permanente ni bahaan diri na area." ("Back then, the area here was like a forest with a soft wetland. And there was no proper drainage there [pointing to the place]. So, we always experienced flooding in this area.") (Transcript 3, Page 5, Lines 251-252).

Situated in a location that is not suitable for farming affected the daily sustenance of the Kalagan. They lacked food, especially rice. They had to wait for the next harvest season to have rice for consumption. This was attested to by an informant in an interview,

"Bugas ma'am, wala na mi bugas lisod na kaayo na sa amoa nga labi na nga daghan mi. Ah, simhuton sa ang humay bago kaunon." ("Rice ma'am. We didn't have sufficient rice. It was so difficult for us considering we were too many [in the family]. We had to smell the rice first before eating.") (T3, P5, L 210-212)

Life was tough for the Kalagan. The poverty they experienced was apparent in their struggle with insufficient food. Likewise, this problem was made worse by the fact that they lived in an area not suited for farming. These circumstances, coupled with the financial difficulty that they experienced, have taught them to be resourceful. They bought empty sacks of flour and sewed them for their clothing. They also used the sacks of flour for their babies' *lampin* (diaper) or clothing. One participant recalled,

"Unya mam ang amoang giniklanan sa una, ambot lang kaha sa ila. Magpalit og sako sa harina. Dili man ko maulaw noh, kay kanang mga underwear karon kay pamaliton naman sa Mall. Kanang sako sa harina himuong pante." ("You know ma'am, our parents before would buy empty flour sacks. I am not ashamed to say this. Nowadays, undergarments are bought from malls. [Before] empty sacks of flour were used to make our panties.") (T3, P13, L625-626)

It is noteworthy that the Kalagan in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur are not the only ones who experienced deprivation. There are reports of poverty being very much evident among indigenous groups in other countries (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Hall & Patrinos, 2012) like in Latin America (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994), Australia (Hunter, 2020; Ross & Mikalauskas, 2018), and Nicaragua (Jamieson, 1999). Hence, it is an accepted fact that IPs worldwide are living destitute lives.

Regarding factors associated with poverty, they considered their geographic location as the main contributor to the deprivation that they experience. They also associated poverty with their lack of education. They share similar situations with other indigenous groups who are at a disadvantage due to a lack of education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994), wealth inheritance (Hunter, 2020), jobs (Ross & Mikalauskas, 2018), medical care, educational and job opportunities, access to credit, and housing (Jamieson, 1999). It is, therefore, deemed that addressing poverty among IPs implies the imperative to resolve these interrelated concerns.

Naivete. The Kalagan also experienced being deliberately fooled by cunning outsiders/people outside their tribe because of their naivete. Their naivete and innocence had made them vulnerable to deceptions by these outsiders, who "tricked" their ancestors into bartering their valued possessions for edible products and selling parcels of land at a very low price. These were apparent in the narratives of the Kalagan women.

"Naabot na gani na sa una nga ang yuta nila kay ilisdan og saging, asukal, tobacco. Mao na sa una dam kay tungod sa kalisod." ("It reached a point in the past where they bartered their land for bananas, sugar, and tobacco because of poverty.") (T3, P8, L365-366)

They, thus, expressed regret for bartering their valued possessions or land for edible products that were a lot less in value. One participant shared,

“Kanang yutaa ba, kumbaga mga dagko na, niya ang ingon ana lang ang ilis. Wala nag hunahuna nga kuan ba kanang ang mga anak nga sumusunod. Wala na nuon moy yuta.” (“These lots are expensive, yet they are bartered for a cheap price. They never thought about their children. They eventually lost their land.”) (T3, P8, L376-377)

Also, since most of the Kalagan women had received no education, other people easily took advantage of their vulnerability. They were easily deceived by outsiders especially when transacting and selling their valued possessions. Some bartered a significant area of their land for a few edible products, or sold them for a very low price just to survive and provide for their basic needs. Reflecting on their naivete and how easily they were deceived has made them deeply regretful. Thus, Kalagan parents have become more determined to educate their children to protect them and prevent them from being taken advantage of in the future. As explained by Mutswanga (2017), gullibility depicts the sad social reality where the underprivileged and the weak are easily deceived by the cunning who have only their interest, not that of the former, in mind. In the context of the Kalagan tribe, since the members were mostly uneducated/unlearned and naïve about the harsh realities of life, they were easily taken advantage of by the more cunning outsiders. Mutswanga (2017, p. 5) further clarified that victims of deception feel “shame and embarrassment.” This experience of shame and embarrassment was affirmed by the Kalagan women participants who expressed deep regret for these unfortunate incidents in their past.

Discrimination. Like other minority groups, the Kalagan were not spared from being discriminated against. Their children, in particular, were bullied by their classmates in school.

“...sa una nga panahon kay kanang kung mang-absent mi kay ingnon kag kalag! kalag! Hala na banhaw na lagi ang Kalag!” (“In the past, when we were absent in class, we were teased and called “Kalag” (meaning soul or ghost). [Such that when we returned to class, they would say] ‘Oh! the soul has risen!’”) (T3, P12, L584-585)

Kalagan pupils also suffered from name-calling because of their affiliation with the indigenous group. This explains why they were not confident in facing other people, especially those whom they perceived were more affluent than they are.

“Kay na sauna, kay dili jud mi maka atubang sa kadaghanang mga tawo. Tan awon namo ang tawo nga medyo arang-arangan, manago man mi.” (“Before, we would never face people. When we saw people whom we perceived were better than us, we would hide.”) (T3, page 12, lines 608-609)

According to the participants, they, specifically their children, experienced being discriminated against. They were hurt by the bullying they had to endure from their classmates in school. They also suffered from name-calling. Thus, these discriminating treatments from others caused them to feel inferior, particularly as they belong to a marginalized group in society. The experience of being discriminated against was also evident among the Aeta, particularly the indigenous women in this ethnic group in the Philippines (Lontoc, 2020). In other countries, aboriginal groups usually experience inadequate opportunities for different public services, like in Nicaragua (Jamieson, 1999), and limited access to services for indigenous people suffering from disabilities as in Australia (Phuong, 2017).

Kalagan Womens' Aspirations

Aside from asking about their life's struggles, the Kalagan women were also requested to share their aspirations for their tribe. Two themes emerged: they long for respect from other people, and they desire their children's academic and professional success.

Longing for Respect from Others. The participants unanimously expressed that they wanted to be respected by other people as members of the Kalagan community. One participant shared her desire not to be discriminated against but to be respected by others, saying,

"Isip usa ka Kalagan community, nga babaye sa Kalagan, dili ma discriminate ang usa ka tribu bilang usa ka woman. Para namo no kay para sa amoa nga isip babae sa Kalagan kay e respeto mi, ana man jud." ("As part of the Kalagan community, particularly being Kalagan women, our tribe should not be discriminated against. For us Kalagan women, we deserve respect. This is how it is supposed to be.") (T3, P10, L496-497)

The Kalagan women believe they could earn the respect of other people if they have children who will become professional and successful. They, therefore, desire for their children to finish not just high school but earn a college degree. The Kalagan, being the dominant tribe in Hagonoy, Davao del Sur, continue to demand respect. This desire to earn the respect of others is not new. Several steps had already been taken in the past to ensure respect and recognition for the IPs (Gilbert, 2022; Reyes et al., 2022; Osakada, 2022; Wook & Hassan, 2022) and underscore their importance and role in the development of governments all over the world. In the Philippines, indigenous women are tapped for forest conservation (Gabriel et al., 2020; Naganag, 2014), climate change adaptation (Whyte, 2014), farming (Parreno-de Guzman (2002), and other similar tasks. Through different agencies of the government, such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and NCIP, indigenous women, like the Kalagan, are recognized and provided opportunities for livelihood and other services. However,

their journey toward acceptance and integration into the mainstream of society remains a challenge.

The Desire for Their Children's Academic and Professional Achievement.

Considering their desire to gain respect from others, Kalagan parents dream of the educational and professional success of their children. As parents who have experienced the harshness of life due to deprivation, they have become determined to send their children to school. Thus, the Kalagan mothers prioritize having their children educated since they were themselves uneducated because of the financial constraints they experienced in the past. One participant commented,

“The best jud nga muhuman sila sa ilahang pag eskwela. Kay sa amoa sauna wala jud pangtustus ana, so para sa ilaha amoa jung ikuan nga kailangan muhuman jud sila og eskwela.” (“It is best for them [their children] to finish their studies. Before, we didn’t have the resources for that. We will give our best to ensure that our children will finish their studies.”) (T3, page 13, lines 669-670)

They admit that as parents, they have nothing to leave their children as an inheritance. Thus, their only legacy is a good education—sending them to school so that they can become professionals. One participant expressed,

“Para namo kailangan jud sila muhuman ka yang edukasyon man gud kay wala mi ikabilin nga dagkong yuta. Ang amoa lang pud ikabilin ang ilang pag eskwela.” (“For us, they should finish school because we have no big land areas for them to inherit. The only legacy we can give is education.”) (T3, P14, L683-684)

Basic education is already addressed by governments in the Philippines and most countries in the world since tuition and other fees are already free. However, there are different aspects where they need assistance and support, such as academic counseling, allowances, and other school requirements, which can be a financial burden to parents.

There are also reports of the young IPs’ unpreparedness to climb the next rung on the education ladder (Vecaldo et al., 2020). In the Philippines, the bigger challenge is getting a tertiary education (Adonis & Couch, 2017). The Kalagan parents want their children to become professionals. The FGD participants explicitly mentioned their dream of having their children get a college or university degree because they knew how difficult it would be for them if they lack a college degree. However, they are aware that it is a tough challenge basically due to financial constraints.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The Kalagan regard their children's education as crucial to liberate them from poverty, naivete, and discrimination. They dream of their children's educational and professional achievements to unshackle the chains of poverty. There is, therefore, a need for more educational opportunities for indigenous groups in the form of scholarship grants. Also, since the IPs have limited resources to earn a living, there is an imperative to provide livelihood programs and opportunities. The national agencies, such as the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) can be tapped by the local government of Hagonoy to maximize the opportunities for jobs, skills training, and small businesses.

The study revealed that the Kalagan were discriminated against by other majority groups, resulting in a feeling of inferiority among the members of this IP group. To address this concern, the local government unit (LGU) may consider strengthening Kalagan involvement in relevant local activities/celebrations such as town fiestas and festivals. These local activities/celebrations can serve as the best venues where the Kalagan can showcase their indigenous heritage through dances, songs, rituals, and exhibits featuring their native food, crafts, and artifacts, thereby gaining recognition, respect, and admiration from non-Kalagan neighbors and guests. Furthermore, outsiders' perceptions of their tribe can change when they learn to appreciate the Kalagan culture and practices. Involving the Kalagan in the above-mentioned activities can give them a strong sense of pride in their tribe and enable them to be more confident in dealing with other people.

People in the academe can reinforce the values of respect toward and appreciation for various IPs by utilizing authentic works of literature in the locality heralding the contributions of these indigenous groups to the rich cultural heritage of the country. The Department of Education (DepEd), through its Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Program, can produce and employ authentic stories of IPs in the locality and properly implement the use of the native tongue or first language (L1) of indigenous learners in the classroom.

Other government agencies can take a closer look at the needs of the Kalagan women and give them priorities in their respective programs and services such as livelihood, education, and training. As to the Kalagan children's academic and professional pursuits, there seems to be a need for a more effective mechanism for how the local government and other relevant government agencies can facilitate access to education and offer continued support to Kalagan students, from the basic to the tertiary levels. One example is by providing easier access to scholarships offered by the DepEd, Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and TESDA, including other supporting mechanisms that would help increase the graduation rate of IPs.

CONCLUSION

Through the lens of the Kalagan indigenous women, life's journey for their tribe was challenging. These were evident in their experiences of poverty, naivete, and discrimination. However, these struggles became their sources of motivation to strive for the improvement of their social condition through their children's education. Thus, to help them fulfill their dream for their children, appropriate forms of support to this indigenous group, such as financial assistance and scholarship grants, are deemed necessary. Education is seen as the key to enabling their children to surmount the challenges that they, as parents, have endured in the past. More importantly, the local government and other relevant government agencies need to be proactive in helping the Kalagan address the challenges they have experienced and provide supporting mechanisms to enable them to achieve their aspirations for their future generation.

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