

Challenges Faced by Indigenous Women in Gender Equality: An Analysis of Lived Experiences

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the perceptions and experiences of IP women leaders in the municipality of Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, regarding gender equality. Despite the advocacy for equal rights, these women encounter significant obstacles in attaining leadership roles and advancing their careers, with persistent employment discrimination. Gender mainstreaming, a strategy that integrates gender perspectives into all government actions, is crucial for reducing disparities. The research highlights the importance of empowerment through leadership, the difficulties of challenging societal norms, the role of leadership in preserving cultural identity, and the resistance to patriarchal structures. It also highlights the economic challenges, the need for social support networks, educational and development opportunities, and the significance of role models and mentorship. The study reveals the challenges these women leaders face and the impact of their leadership. The conclusions offer valuable insights for Indigenous Political Structures and leaders to create policies that promote gender equality and support indigenous women in recognizing their potential leadership roles. By contributing cultural knowledge, advocacy, and empowerment, these women can greatly influence their communities, as well as play the role of political empowerment in ensuring credible and legitimate decision-making that benefits the entire community. Through in-depth interviews and observation, this project fills the gap in understanding indigenous women's perceptions of gender equality, providing a resource for informed decision-making and strategic planning to advance gender equality within their communities.

Keywords: Indigenous People Women, Leadership, Challenges, Gender Equality, Blaan Tribe

INTRODUCTION

This research aims to explore the challenges and experiences of indigenous women in leadership roles, focusing on the province of Davao del Sur, specifically in the municipality of Kiblawan. Historically, leadership positions have predominantly been held by men, a practice rooted in traditional beliefs that leaders should be chosen for their bravery, loyalty to their people, and the ability to resolve conflicts such as tribal wars. Indigenous women have been relegated to secondary roles, expected to manage both household responsibilities and work outside the home.

Among the things where women have little by little manifested their presence is in governance. According to UNDP (1998) governance is an exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences. Still, they are not yet fully accepted when it comes to gender. These are the so-called gender gaps, which are recognized today as key constraints preventing women from realizing their potential and from enhancing the substantive choices they must make (Economic Commission for Africa).

In the sector of the indigenous communities, women empowerment is now being recognized but not to its totality. Traditionally, decision-making remains a male-dominated sphere (Gender, Good Governance, Decentralization and Public Sector Reform). Men and women have different gender roles and responsibilities and for that reason they also

often have different needs, desires, and interests. And, with the gradual loss of collective ownership of lands and other natural resources and the introduction by dominant outsiders of institutions of private property, indigenous women progressively lost their traditional rights to lands and natural resources (Gender and Indigenous People).

The enforcement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number five, which advocates for gender equality, has potentially introduced Blaan women in Kiblawan to the concept of equal rights for all, particularly in the realm of employment. Despite this, women struggle to achieve formal equality with men, facing significant barriers to entering leadership positions and advancing in their careers. Discrimination in employment remains a pervasive issue. In the recent development on this aspect across the globe, gender mainstreaming is now being put into practice. Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of a gender equality perspective across all government actions (Gender Mainstreaming, Governance and Leadership). This a strategy to reduce disparities between men and women, involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities. Gender equality is not only the concern of women, but of men and boys too (Gender and Indigenous People).

This gap highlights the necessity for research into indigenous women's perceptions of gender equality and their awareness of SDG 5. Currently, there is a lack of studies addressing this issue in Kiblawan. This project sought to address this gap through in-depth interviews and surveys, aiming to understand women's views on gender equality in employment.

The findings of this study served as a valuable resource for IP leaders to develop policies, frameworks for strategic planning, and make informed decisions that promote gender equality within their communities. This research would support indigenous women in recognizing and fulfilling their potential role in promoting gender equality in leadership, by contributing cultural knowledge, advocacy, leadership, role modeling, cultural preservation, and empowerment. Women's political empowerment is crucial to ensuring decisions are credible and legitimate. When women and men share the power to make decisions and lead, the benefits are felt throughout their communities (Gender Equality and Democratic Governance).

The study was conducted in the municipality of Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. The main participants of this study are the indigenous women holding an individual and with different positions under the Indigenous Political Structure in a span of five (5) years. The participants were interviewed via a prepared questionnaire in the Municipal Tribal Office.

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research design, primarily utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KII) to achieve its objectives. The research was limited to exploring the role of IP women leaders, without involving Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP), as the focus was specifically on the challenges and experiences of indigenous women in leadership roles within the municipality of Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. Data collection involved interviewing indigenous women who had held leadership positions within the Indigenous Political Structure for at least five years. Participants were selected based on their roles and standing in the community, and interviews were conducted using a prepared questionnaire. These interviews were held either at the Municipal Tribal Office or at a location convenient for the participants.

The data gathered from these interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, which helped identify key themes and patterns related to the challenges and experiences faced by indigenous women leaders. The findings from this study provided valuable insights for Indigenous Peoples (IP) leaders, aiding in the development of policies and strategic frameworks that promote gender equality. This research supported indigenous women in recognizing and fulfilling their potential roles in leadership, advocacy, and cultural preservation.

The study is significant as it sought to enhance understanding of the barriers to gender equality in leadership among indigenous communities and to inform policy development that empowers indigenous women. Through this research, there was an opportunity to contribute to the broader goals of gender equality as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, particularly within the context of the Blaan Tribe in Kiblawan.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE

Before collecting data, the researcher sent a request letter to the Municipal Tribal Chieftain and obtained Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), with endorsement from the Research Director, to conduct the study. To ensure

participants understood the interview questions, the researcher translated the interview guide into Blaán and Cebuano, providing detailed instructions regarding the interview process.

The data collection lasted about a week, during which the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants. With the informants' permission, responses were recorded using a voice recorder as a backup. The researcher engaged in thorough discussions to gain a deep understanding of the topics addressed. The interviews included a series of questions that explored various aspects of the participants' perspectives and involvement, allowing for a comprehensive examination of their views.

To facilitate organized and in-depth discussions, the researcher began with broad questions and gradually delved into more specific topics, following the technique recommended by Smith and Osbourn in 2007. Prior to the interviews, permission was obtained from each participant to record the sessions using a smartphone's audio-recording feature, which was essential for accurately capturing their insights. After completing the interviews, the audio files were carefully transcribed, and any identifying information was removed to ensure the participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

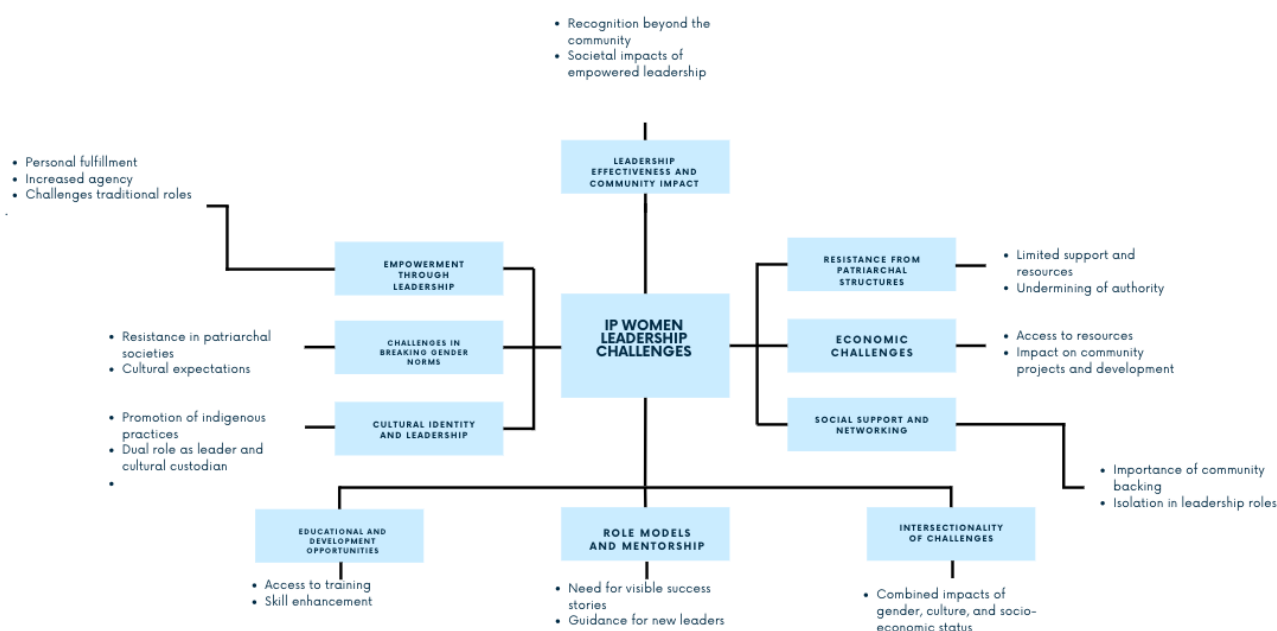


Figure 1. Thematic Structure

This section contains the core concepts derived by the researchers from the responses of participants who took part in the in-depth interviews.

The recurring themes that were found in the participants' responses during these interviews were used as the basis for organizing and classifying the information gathered from them. The categorized data are presented visually through figures and tables, providing a structured overview of the study's problem statement. Additionally, the researchers included detailed explanations and references to relevant literature to enhance the interpretation of the study's findings.

The lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IP) Women leaders reveals a complex interplay of empowerment, resistance, and cultural identity that shapes their leadership roles.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LEADERSHIP

The first theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is *Empowerment Through Leadership*. Empowerment through leadership stands out as a key theme and there are three subthemes that emerged from the responses of the participants the (1) Personal Fulfillment, (2) Increased Agency, and (3) Challenges Traditional Roles.

The goal of Empowering Women to Lead Change is to support young women advance their careers and provide them the opportunity to take the lead on topics that matter to them. It provides captivating and lively activities to inspire and empower young women to think that they can be catalysts for change and inspire others to follow. Realizing that promoting the leadership of young women is crucial to societal transformation both now and in the future. In addition to overcoming obstacles in their daily lives, women are always coming up with creative, practical solutions. Through combining their creativity and wisdom, women are driving change [53].

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to *the Personal Fulfillment*. The responses provided by the participants shed light on the ongoing positive effects and advantages that they have encountered since assuming the role of the IP Women Leader within their barangays. These insights highlighted the continuing ripple of benefits and meaningful changes experienced by these leaders within their communities, emphasizing the significance of their contributions and the enduring impact of their leadership.

[23], women in leadership positions report a significant increase in personal fulfillment and agency, challenging traditional societal structures that often restrict their roles. As they negotiate their duties, women in leadership positions frequently experience a tremendous rise in personal fulfillment and agency. They now can influence policies, enact important decisions, and effect change in their domains of influence. They become more forceful in standing up for their demands and goals, and this newly discovered sense of agency spills over into their personal life as well as their careers.

In addition to helping themselves personally, many female leaders are tearing down obstacles and questioning conventional gender stereotypes, which advances the larger cause of gender equality. [20], personal fulfillment for women leaders is linked to meaningful careers, mentorship for work-life balance, and a strong work ethic, as per the study on work-life balance strategies. Research on work-life strategies indicates that several elements that affect women leaders' general well-being and job satisfaction are closely related to their personal fulfillment. The knowledge that their labor has purpose and benefits their organizations and communities provides female leaders with a profound sense of fulfillment. Whether they are spearheading social change campaigns, driving innovation, or creating nurturing workplace cultures, these leaders derive satisfaction from contributing to positive change in the world through their careers.

Indigenous women leaders exemplify resilience and strength, often stepping into roles that allow them to advocate for their communities while pursuing personal fulfillment. However, their journeys are frequently marred by significant challenges that can undermine their confidence and effectiveness. One primary challenge is the interplay between cultural expectations and leadership roles. Indigenous women often navigate a landscape fraught with traditional norms that dictate their behavior and responsibilities.

Furthermore, for women leaders to find personal fulfillment in their employment, they must have a strong work ethic. They frequently exhibit perseverance, devotion, and a passion for perfection in their work.

The second subtheme under this theme is *Increased Agency*. [49], increased agency to leaders refers to the enhanced sense of empowerment and capability among individuals aspiring to or engaged in leadership roles. The concept of agency is crucial in various fields, including education, social sciences, and psychology.

[24], there is still discrimination against Indigenous individuals in leadership positions in several fields, including education, medicine, athletics, and other fields. Studies highlight the ways in which organizations often fail to address the underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in leadership roles, which perpetuates their marginalization and exclusion. The systemic issue highlights the necessity of implementing coordinated strategies to tackle prejudices and establish inclusive settings that not only acknowledge but also actively value and support Indigenous perspectives.

The third subtheme under this theme is the *Challenges Traditional Roles*. Challenges traditional roles in the context of Indigenous peoples refers to behaviors or movements inside Indigenous communities that defy or depart from accepted social structures, cultural norms, or expectations. These difficulties frequently result from attempts at assimilation, past and present colonization, and the imposing of Western systems and ideals on Indigenous societies.

Being IP Women Leaders became difficult for them because, in their community, leadership roles are often awarded to men. When it comes to Indigenous peoples, actions or movements that depart from established social structures, cultural norms, or expectations are considered challenges to traditional roles. Assimilation attempts, past and present

colonization, and the imposing of Western systems and values on Indigenous societies are frequently the causes of these difficulties. Challenging traditional roles in Indigenous communities is a complex and varied process that has its roots in historical contexts as well as current efforts for self-determination and cultural regeneration.

Indigenous youth are aware that the globe and its areas are undergoing a period of transition, distinguished on the one hand by significant players committed to human rights and, on the other, by current movements opposed to their implementation. The global situation in which Indigenous Peoples find themselves because of COVID-19 has distinct features that differ from those of the general population, owing primarily to geographical, cultural, and historical conditions and contexts that differ in each of the seven socio-cultural regions in which Indigenous Peoples live [34].

In conclusion, historical legacies of colonization, ongoing battles for self-determination, and modern initiatives to reclaim and revive Indigenous cultures and identities are all closely linked to challenges to traditional roles among Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities are paving the road for more autonomy, resilience, and cultural sustainability by questioning and challenging conventional norms and expectations.

CHALLENGES IN BREAKING GENDER NORMS

The second theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is the Challenges in Breaking Gender Norms. Challenges in Breaking Gender Norms stands out as a key theme and there are two subthemes that emerged from the responses of the participants the (1) Resistance in Patriarchal societies, and (2) Cultural Expectations.

[15], women who rise to positions of leadership are frequently up against additional prejudices related to leadership that are based on their gender, personal traits, and capacity for effective leadership. These challenges reflect a larger cultural trend that links masculine characteristics to leadership, which frequently results in unfavorable opinions of female leaders who defy these expectations. Stereotypes based on gender pose a serious barrier to women's professional growth as leaders, requiring a great deal of work and persistence.

In addition, [29] stated that gender stereotypes are also prevalent, and in settings where males predominate, women frequently face a glass ceiling. It is an example of a pervasive and deeply embedded gender-based obstacle that women face in the workplace and must overcome with much effort. For this reason, many women who want to contribute to their organizations find it to be an ongoing difficulty.

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to *Resistance in Patriarchal societies*. The responses provided by the participants presented obstacles that women must overcome to eradicate gender discrimination ingrained in leadership roles. Their experiences depict the struggles and the process of going up against societal hurdles. By their bravery, these women have brought changes and provide long-lasting influence on their respective communities.

[11], many IP women face staunch resistance within patriarchal and traditional frameworks, which sometimes view their ascendancy as a threat to established gender norms.

Furthermore, the challenges posed by gender norms and stereotypes to the IP Women serve as a source of opposition for them in aspiring leadership positions. They bring forth a new era of inclusive and equitable leadership, challenge established power structures and reinvent paradigms for leadership. Hence, IP Women leaders also contend with significant resistance when attempting to deviate from established gender roles within their communities.

The second subtheme under this theme is *Cultural Expectations*. The responses provided by the participants presented Cultural expectations that confine women to specific roles can drastically limit their leadership opportunities. This resistance is often rooted in deeply entrenched gender biases that exist within their societies. These women leaders face challenges due to stereotypical expectations about their capabilities and roles. They are often typecast into traditional female roles, such as caregivers, which can preclude them from being considered for leadership positions that are perceived to require assertive and independent traits traditionally ascribed to men.

Additionally, [52] stated that every time a woman has ventured to pursue difficult but rewarding experiences, woman has to contend with competing cultural expectations while moving through a variety of roles in diverse organizations. Despite the fierce competition, women's access to leadership possibilities is further complicated by gender norms, particularly in rural and remote developing world societies where leadership roles are traditionally deemed masculine.

With these responses it underscored the Challenges of IP Women in Breaking Gender Norms. The struggles that confine women to specific roles can drastically limit their leadership opportunities. This resistance is often rooted in deeply entrenched gender biases that exist within their societies. These women leaders face challenges due to stereotypical expectations about their capabilities and roles. They are often typecast into traditional female roles, such as caregivers, which can preclude them from being considered for leadership positions that are perceived to require assertive and independent traits traditionally ascribed to men.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP

The third theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is the Cultural Identity and Leadership with two subthemes which are (1) Promotion of Indigenous Practices and (2) Dual role as leader and cultural custodian.

[22], the role of Indigenous women in sustaining cultural identity and leadership within their communities is significant. Their acts, which are based on ancestral knowledge and customs, seek at eliminating discrimination and racism while also promoting intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Through their leadership, these women not only preserve cultural traditions, but also inspire future generations to proudly embrace their cultural identity. They bridge the gap between the past and the present, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and practices thrive in today's world. However, it has been observed that some Indigenous women leaders possess a weak foundation in Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, which can lead to ineffective decision-making and limited participation. Many acknowledge that they sometimes forget important knowledge that is essential for being effective leaders in their communities. This knowledge gap is often attributed to the contamination of traditional practices passed down through generations.

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to *Promotion of Indigenous Practices*. The responses of the participants presented the encouragement of the preservation, revitalization, and celebration of indigenous cultures' traditional customs, knowledge, and rituals. This involves recognizing the significance of indigenous ways of existence and their role in promoting cultural diversity and understanding.

[46], it emphasizes how important leadership is to preserve and develop cultural identity. It explores the complex interrelationship between cultural expression and leadership, illuminating the ways in which leaders impact the expression and maintenance of cultural values and customs in the settings in which they operate.

The second subtheme under this theme pertains to *Dual role as leader and cultural custodian*. The responses of the participants presented that women leaders not only hold leadership roles within their respective tribes, but also bear the responsibility of maintaining, promoting, and embodying the cultural values and traditions of their communities.

[50], as a leader and cultural custodian, one accepts a position of authority with certain responsibilities. Among these responsibilities is the enforcement and preservation of values and norms that promote fairness, equity, and equal opportunity for all. These principles help to create an atmosphere in which everyone may actively engage, learn, and thrive without facing unfair advantages or disadvantages.

With the extracted responses, it is evident how successful leadership may act as a catalyst for promoting cultural heritage and facilitating meaningful cultural expression by looking at the ways in which leadership and cultural identity relate.

RESISTANCE FROM PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES

The fourth theme that emerged from the responses of the participants is the Resistance from Patriarchal Structures with two subthemes which are (1) Limited support and resources and (2) Undermining of authority.

[10]. Resistance from patriarchal structure describes the various methods in which female leaders subvert, question, and/or alter prevailing unfair gender stereotypes. Women encountered barriers to a college education because of the conservative gender views held by family members, who associated women's education with a loss of honor and cultural customs. But by pursuing education, female leaders opposed these repressive beliefs and the unfair conventions.

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to *Limited support and resources*. The responses of the participants highlighted the main challenges that IP women face while trying to aspire leadership positions. These difficulties

include obstacles to education and training because of societal and financial limitations, a lack of mentors and role models.

[31], economic challenges are another significant barrier, as financial constraints often limit these women's ability to lead effectively by restricting the resources available for community projects. Despite these challenges, social support and networking emerge as crucial factors that enable these women to overcome obstacles and fulfill their roles effectively. Networks provide essential support, helping to counteract the isolation that can come from leadership positions [21].

The second subtheme under this theme pertains to *Undermining of authority*. The responses of the participants highlighted the women in leadership. In tribal settings where men dominate, tribes, women may encounter prejudice and skepticism about their abilities based only on their gender. This stereotype can lead to others doubting their judgment or authority.

[45], the degree to which we take males more seriously than women is reflected in the authority gap. Until a man proves otherwise, we tend to presume that he understands what he's talking about. In contrast, this is much too frequently not the case for women, and as a result, they are frequently underestimated. They frequently get cut off and talked over. They must demonstrate their abilities more, and when they hold positions of power, we frequently find them unsettling.

With the responses, it was presented that the resistance from patriarchal structures within their communities reflects broader societal challenges where male-dominated hierarchies are prevalent. This resistance can include limited access to resources, inadequate support from male counterparts, and a lack of representation in decision-making processes.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The fifth theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is *Economic Challenges*. Economic Challenges stands out as a key theme and there are three subthemes that emerged from the responses of the participants the (1) Access to resources, and (2) Impact on community projects and development.

[26] female participation in socio-economic development during the peace processes has also been limited to a handful of less economically challenged women. Poor rural women, especially the indigenous, are often unable to participate in socio-economic development activities, faced with the same barriers that restrict their grassroots political participation. Even when able to participate in such activities, mobilized by external actors, their participation often remains passive, being only targets of information dissemination or awareness raising. Government members and development practitioners persistently enforce male-centered views, with women kept at the periphery of livelihood support. Additionally, there are often divisions and disparities among women in a conflict-affected community, with marginalized group members facing additional discrimination and barriers from other women regarding access to resources and effective participation.

Economic constraints, which are a result of past injustices and societal inequalities, continue to provide a persistent challenge for Indigenous women leaders in terms of resource access. Indigenous women frequently encounter major obstacles in achieving leadership roles and effectively advocating for their communities. These obstacles include limited financial assistance, restricted access to education and training, and discriminatory practices. Economic hardships make these differences even more severe by limiting their access to necessities.

The first subtheme under this theme is *Access to Resources*. [51], women leaders are acknowledged for their resonance-building leadership styles, adaptive communication skills and qualities of cooperation, mentoring and collaboration - traits that are becoming increasingly important to leadership in contemporary organizations. Gender-based stereotypes influenced by the cultural value dimensions of society are seen as the major barriers to women's advancement.

The second subtheme under this theme is *Impact on community projects and development*. The economic obstacles that Indigenous Peoples (IP) women leaders in the Philippines need to conquer have a substantial impact on community projects and development. Overcoming these obstacles is critical to the empowerment of IP women leaders; the impact and success of community projects that aim to improve livelihoods are contingent upon the leaders' ability to overcome these obstacles.

[1], economic inequality entails unequal distribution or access to the commonwealth and thus leading to the emergence of “the have and the have not” or the rich and poor. The above condition makes community development well-nigh difficult if not impossible. It is common knowledge that the gap between the rich and the poor affects their respective level of participation both in utterances and actions. There is usually low participation from the poor group due largely to their low financial strength and thus a constraint to effective community development.

Like most developing countries, the Philippines suffered greatly from the series of financial crises that hit Asia since 1997. The weakening of the country's economy due to the contraction of the financial and manufacturing sectors increased the rates of unemployment across occupational sectors, weakened the agricultural economy, and caused severe shortages in government resource allocation for social development programs. Nonetheless, there are continuous expressions of resistance, especially at the community level and among organized women's groups around the country today. Economic challenges in the Philippines have hindered community projects, despite increased women leaders. Resistance at the community level persists, advocating for empowerment and addressing globalization's negative impacts [47].

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND NETWORKING

The sixth theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is Social Support and Networking. Social Support and Networking stands out as a key theme and there are two subthemes that emerged from the responses of the participants the (1) Importance of Community Backing, and (2) Isolation in Leadership Roles.

[35], Supportive leadership is exhibited through individual attention and consideration of organizational members' needs. Supervisors who practice supportive leadership understand and care for their members' personal circumstances, helping to both minimize their work-family conflicts and maintain work-life balance. Recognizing that family-friendly workplace policies are ineffective if bosses do not provide related information or allow members to use it, several studies have highlighted the importance of supportive bosses. Moreover, the close relationship between supportive leadership and job performance, including creativity, has drawn more attention to supportive leadership that, research has shown, motivates members to perform better by providing them responsibility and the authority to work on their own. Family social support refers to the emotional and instrumental support given by family members when needed. Individuals' family members can help them perform multiple roles in both the work and family domains by providing psychological support, expressing empathy, and demonstrating understanding.

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to the *Importance of Community Backing*. Creating social spaces through community backing is crucial for empowering IP women leaders in the Philippines. This support fosters networking, mentorship, and advocacy for gender equality within civil society and government. Through fostering resilience, self-assurance, and network expansion, mentoring supports emerging female leaders.

The Philippines has made significant progress in empowering women and in advancing gender equality. The government's policy on gender equality and women's empowerment has prioritized women's economic empowerment, advanced human rights and enhancing gender-responsive local governance. All these priority concerns are integral components of poverty reduction programs in the Philippines. The Philippines has made significant progress in empowering women and in advancing gender equality. In 2004, the commission drafted a framework plan for women that identify three priority concerns to meet the objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment: economic empowerment of women, protection and fulfillment of women's human rights, and gender-responsive governance. Projects that support these priorities will facilitate more equitable development across the Philippines, including supporting the full participation of women in political processes and governance in the international and national local level, strengthening gender-sensitive and inclusive programs and mechanisms with civil society, and increasing women's access to economic resources such as capital, technology, information, markets, and training [6].

The second subtheme under this theme is *Isolation in Leadership Roles*. Few in administrative leadership roles would find it difficult to blend in with male cliques and styles, which could make them feel more isolated and subject to criticism all the time.

[37], there is also mandatory representation of indigenous peoples in policy-making bodies and other local legislative councils [17]. However, for indigenous women, there are numerous hurdles for them to overcome to be able to sit in

any of these representations—both as indigenous and as women. Women sectoral representation hardly ever goes to indigenous women; while in the IP mandatory representation (IPMR), there is a very limited number of women who would be chosen by the communities and endorsed by the leaders. While there is a growing recognition of indigenous women's leadership and roles in the community, it is still a struggle for them to be part of the official decision-making structures. This is still very much the reality even within the indigenous peoples' political structure, where women play crucial roles in mediation, peace building, health, protection of the environment, and food production—but are given very limited space in the decision-making processes.

EDUCATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The seventh theme that came forth and emerged from the responses of the participants is Educational and Development Opportunities. Educational and developmental opportunities for Indigenous women leaders are crucial for fostering their empowerment, promoting cultural diversity, and advancing their communities. Educational and Development Opportunities stands out as a key theme and there are three subthemes that emerged from the responses of the participants the (1) Access to Trainings, and (2) Skill Enhancement.

Women are constantly expressing their leadership influence felt in commerce, management, academia, architecture, healthcare, and other sectors on a local, national, and worldwide scale. Women are becoming increasingly motivated to break through the traditional glass ceiling that has kept them from ascending to positions of leadership, while possessing the required skills and ability. Gender has no bearing on leadership. It's a set of leadership qualities that come naturally or are nurtured in people growing into powerful leaders with a wide following. Both males and females may be leaders. Females pursue to be under-represented in political office all over the world, and they continue to know less about and participate in politics than males. Women's engagement in politics and the democratic process changes around the world, but it has become an important aspect of modern discussions about development and governance [43].

The first subtheme under this theme pertains to *Access to Trainings*. Barriers to women's leadership in different countries and settings have been well established in the literature at the individual and institutional levels. Lack of mentorship, workplace power imbalances, work-home responsibility imbalance, and gender bias may occur at each career stage for women and affect career advancement.

While it is useful to identify the challenges preventing women's leadership and the need for it, it is even more crucial to create advocacy agendas and implement solutions to enable more women to emerge as successful leaders. Individual, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy factors all impact women's access to and success in leadership roles, and a multi-level approach to finding solutions is necessary to see women reach their full potential as leaders. Essential skills, on the other hand, are the "extra", non-technical efforts required to attain and succeed in a leadership position such as competencies in personal development, networking, job seeking, management, mentorship, and cultural competency skills. These skills are subjective but reinforce and complement technical competencies. Specific training in these areas is needed.[19].

The second subtheme under this theme pertains to *Skill Enhancement*. [36], woman tends to be naturally expert at skills such as problem solving, networking, and handling different tasks simultaneously, and effortlessly.

Women have always been born managers, as they keep doing all their in-home tasks without even compromising on their out-of-home jobs. Skill is the bridge between a job and the workforce. Several government programs provide many training programs and technical opportunities to encourage the empowerment of women's skills. A woman can compete on par with men and take on as much responsibility as men do. Not everyone may be able to get a government job, but a skilled woman can improve the economic condition of her family by working. By working with confidence, a self-sufficient woman can not only emerge as the financial strength of her family, but she can also set an example for the rest of the weaker women. A skilled woman can make a big contribution to achieving gender equality by working efficiently and changing not only the map of her family but also the face of the world.

ROLE MODELS AND MENTORSHIP

The eighth theme that emerged from the responses of the participants is the *Role Models and Mentorship*. This theme demonstrates the vital role of role models and mentors in inspiring and guiding new women leaders, in line with Murrell, [48] findings. The said theme has emerged with two subthemes, the (1) Need for Visible Success Stories and (2) Guidance for New Leaders.

Researchers suggest that women need role models who can show them how to advance despite existing barriers [27]. There is a critical need to prepare women to form leadership identities, negotiate barriers to women's advancement, seek mentoring and role models, support one another, and combat stereotyped attitudes toward women's leadership [39].

The first subtheme is the *Need for Visible Success Stories*. [16], visible success stories are crucial for Indigenous Peoples to counter structural inequalities in global policy planning, ensuring their agency, heritage, and culture are not marginalized in development frameworks.

"... Sa akoo isip nga kuan, isip nga IP Women or at the same time Barangay Kagawad, kanang ah sauna tama na siya nga ang pwede mag leader is lalaki pero kung sa pagkakaron mas murag nakita pud nako nga bisag ako isip ko nga babae ako gyud pong ipakita pud ang kung unsa ang makaya sa lalaki makaya pud namo nga mga babae, ug unsa ang pag handle sa mga tao ug bisan sa akong isip nga IP Women usahay makaingon ko unsa kaha akong function isip usa ka IP Women kay murag bali murag wala lang ba nga sa ngalan lang IP Women ka pero murag wala nimo gikuan kung unsa imong function pero diha pud nako nakita nga isip nga leader pud ka isip leader sa Tribo lisod kaayo sa among Tribo siyempre sa Tribo nga Bla'an naay mga gahig ulo dinha, naay dili kasabot sabton bisag uhm tama unta saimuha sa ilaha dili tama."

"... In my opinion, as an IP Women or at the same time Barangay Kagawad, it is right that the only one who can be a leader is a man, but at the moment it seems that I also see that even though I think I am a woman, I can actually show what a man can do, we women can also do, and how to handle people and even in my mind as an IP Women sometimes I can say what my function as an IP Women is because it seems like there is nothing. You are just an IP Women in name only, but you don't seem to understand what your function is, but I also saw that as a leader, as a leader of the Tribe, it is very difficult for our Tribe, of course, in the Bla'an Tribe, there are stubborn people there. There are people who don't understand even though it is right, it's not right for them."

Participant 3

Women are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions that confer significant influence over others. Women's occupational disadvantage in the United States is not based on prestige, as women are highly represented in numerous professional professions that bestow somewhat high prestige, such as teachers, registered nurses, and social workers. However, men are more likely to hold positions with decision-making authority and the capacity to influence others' salaries or promotions [46].

[38], even though working women were better educated than employed men in some times, such as the 1950s, women's pay and representation in workplace leadership roles were never equal to men's. Despite having more domestic duties, women report putting more effort into their jobs than males [7].

Women's advancement to elite leadership positions has accelerated in recent years. Female leaders have come to signify modernity and the promise for improved leadership in various contexts as the division of labor between men and women has changed [2].

The second subtheme that emerged is the *Guidance for New Leaders*. Advice, direction, and assistance given to people taking on leadership roles for the first time are sometimes referred to as guidance for new leaders. A variety of subjects, such as team management, communication techniques, leadership concepts, decision-making procedures, and negotiating organizational dynamics, may be covered by this advice.

The responses of the participants implied that as a leader, it would be much better to be patient and generous. To attain good leadership towards the subordinates and when patience and generosity converge in leadership, it creates a synergistic effect that catalyzes positive change and growth within the organization. Team members will feel valued and empowered, knowing that their contributions are recognized and appreciated. This, in turn, fosters a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose, driving the team towards achieving common goals and objectives. In conclusion, leadership is a product of the group's goals and ideals, as well as of the structure and methods available to achieve them. It is not a fixed quality of personality. True leadership is essential to the effectiveness of military operations, even though the organization is based on a dominance caste system rather than a free leadership arrangement [14].

Leadership, as described by [13], is the process of persuading others to achieve the intended goals. According to [5], for workers to complete tasks and provide the intended outcomes, leaders must inspire, encourage, and recognize them. Different leadership philosophies are used by leaders to inspire and encourage their workforce. According to Lok and [28], an organization's success or failure can be more accurately predicted by its leadership.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF CHALLENGES

The ninth theme that emerged from the responses of the participants is the *Intersectionality of Challenges* with its subtheme Combined Impacts of Gender, Culture, and Socio-economic Status. The intersectionality of challenges in Indigenous peoples refers to the compounding effects of various forms of discrimination, oppression, and marginalization experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities because of the intersection of multiple social identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, and others. This concept acknowledges that Indigenous peoples are oppressed because of the interaction of different systems of power and privilege.

The notion of intersectionality offers a conceptual framework for comprehending the various forms of marginalization and discrimination that overlap and discourage female leaders, as well as the power structures that may impact their experiences and abilities both within and outside of the workplace [32]. It can provide a deeper comprehension of the ways in which oppression and social injustice are caused by the interplay of various aspects of identity, including gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation [6].

Understanding interwoven oppressions and the alliances that result from them via the lens of intersectionality is insufficient to make sense of the groups' incommensurable memories and relationships. As [12] acknowledges, "Intersectionality alone cannot bring invisible bodies into view." It is important to understand intersectionality as a temporary and local starting point rather than as the theoretical conclusion of feminism.

The only subtheme that emerged in this theme is the *Combined Impacts of Gender, Culture, and Socio-Economic Status*.

To address the major obstacles that varied women who aspire to leadership encounter, intersectionality offers a potent way to comprehend leadership experiences and aptitude at the nexus of culture and gender [4]. An essential component of society's social and economic structure is the equitable representation of varied women in leadership positions. Diverse viewpoints and life experiences are essential for fostering creativity, economic expansion, and social advancement. Although women's employment rates have increased, their ascent to senior leadership roles is still very low [9].

In the Australian setting, the leadership of Indigenous women is complex, intricate, and infrequently observed or honored. Outside of their communities, indigenous women are mainly ignored despite the intentional improvements they bring about to the Australian continent. From the previous dissertation [40] the generational concerns that emerge, the intersectional gender challenges, and feminism as a white construct. Participant interviews revealed issues of concern for younger emerging leaders. Understanding the obstacles that Indigenous women encounter is crucial to comprehending the reasons for their potential disinclination to assume leadership positions. It is within this intersectionality that the researchers observe their hesitation to identify with and claim the title of "leader."

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The tenth theme that emerged from the responses of the participants is the *Leadership Effectiveness and Community Impact* with its two themes, (1) Recognition beyond the community and (2) Societal impacts of empowered leadership.

[18] explained that women's leadership leads to increased profits and productivity in organizations due to their ability to improve the quality of management and diversity. [33] found out that the presence of women in corporate leadership was associated with higher firm profitability. Thus, firms with at least one female leader, whether board member or executive officer, consistently had superior financial performance to male-only firms over a period of more than two decades.

[3], team performance is significantly impacted by women's leadership. Women make excellent leaders because of their engaging leadership style and the trusting relationships they foster with their team members, which help workers accomplish their objectives.

Men are generally perceived and anticipated to be more forceful, and autonomous than women, whereas women are typically regarded and expected to be more communal, relations-oriented, and nurturing. The traditional stereotypes of leaders align with the autonomous traits linked to men [42].

The first subtheme is the *Recognition Beyond the Community*. The specific response provided by the participant under the generated subtheme is listed below. The participant said that,

"... Murag dugay dugay man ko sa kalahi murag 7 years man guro, katong 2022 nahimo kong the best volunteer sa Region XI."

"... It seems like I have been in a position for 7 years, in 2022 I became the best volunteer in Region XI."

Participant 1

Acknowledging women leaders from Indigenous Peoples (IP) is about more than just showcasing their achievements; it's about paying respect to the unwavering commitment, resolve, and ceaseless labor that made their successes possible. Building a culture of empowerment and unity among IP women leaders is facilitated by their sharing of success with their communities. We acknowledge that the victories of these women contribute to the resiliency and vibrancy of the community, thus the goal is to honor the accomplishments of all the women, not to single them out for attention. Acknowledgment is not only a personal triumph; it's a first step toward creating a society where women feel confident, empowered, and supported. It's a commitment to creating a legacy that inspires others to follow their passions, conquer challenges, and shatter glass ceilings [4].

The second subtheme is the *Societal Impacts of Empowered Leadership*. The specific response provided by the participant under the generated subtheme is listed below. The participant said that,

"... Nakita pud sa among Kapitan nga ingon to ato nga dili lang pud sa Women ko naga focus para pud tabang pud sa Katilingban."

"... Our captain also saw that I am not only focusing on women but also to help the society as well."

-Participant 2

The participant's reaction suggested that an effective leadership style could have a positive social influence within the IP community. [30] state that a leader's style is the way they engage with others. It includes managing, guiding, and all other strategies and tactics employed by leaders to inspire subordinates to adhere to their directives. Thus, a leader's style refers to how they give guidance to his or her team to do their jobs, how the leader inspires and develops the followers, and how the leader interacts and communicates with the group.

Empowering leadership is defined as leader behaviors directed at individuals or entire teams and consisting of delegating authority to employees, promoting their self-directed and autonomous decision making, coaching, sharing information, and asking for input [44].

Leadership style is an important management tool because, if used properly, it can enhance positive relationships with employees, improve the organizational climate, and increase service performance [25].

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings after a thorough data gathering and analysis, the following conclusions are formulated:

1. The results of the study revealed that there is a need for Empowerment through Leadership. This demonstrates how leadership roles empower women by providing them with a sense of fulfillment and agency. In the case of the IP Women Leaders, there is a need to provide them a wider scope for their leadership capacity to manifest for not only that their presence is essential, their part in governance must also be respected.
2. The study also uncovers the truth on the presence of Challenges in Breaking the Norm. This highlights the societal resistance faced by women in leadership roles within patriarchal frameworks. In the IP society where male dominance is prevalent, the plight of IP women leaders in governance is an uphill battle. For the society where they dwell is traditional wherein to break the established taboo is an act of transgression, even to the point of becoming a sacrilegious act.
3. Another thing that was unraveled by this endeavor is the sense of Cultural Identity and Leadership. This emphasizes the role of leadership in promoting and preserving cultural identity. In the case of women IP leaders,

their sense of appreciation for their cultural identity is further boosted by their leadership. As they were able to manifest who they are in the field of governance and be at par with the other leaders from other tribes and cultural groups.

4. Though the IP society is structured to be patriarchal, this is now being challenged by the recent trends in governance. The results showed that there is now a growing Resistance from Patriarchal Structures which is evident by the presence of these women leaders in the society.
5. Economic Challenge is among the many barriers that women leaders in the IP communities have been subjecting too and are battling at. This forms many constraints that limit the manifestation and effectiveness of these women leaders.
6. As to support mechanism the presence of robust and strong Social Support and Networking is one the necessary for an effective leadership. For the women leaders, a robust social network and support will be of great help as it makes them have easy access to funds, availment of programs and projects, and in such other needs.
7. In terms of educational background, majority of the IP women leaders are not college graduate. This somehow hampers them from really taking the full role as leaders in their communities. Education is not only in terms of formal mechanisms but also by means of non-formal modalities such as workshops, seminars, training, and other related activities. Hence, Educational and Development Opportunities are among the needs of these women leaders.
8. For women leaders there is a need for Role Model and Mentorship. This demonstrates the vital role of role models and mentors in inspiring and guiding new women leaders. They are new in the system, and they need further guidance and honing in the process of affecting and implementing thorough, inclusive, and effective leadership.
9. Among the findings of this research is the Intersectionality of Challenges, which reflects the multi-layered challenges faced by women based on gender, cultural background, socio-economic status. These challenges become the barriers upon which the women leaders take time to hurdle.
10. As women act in leadership, the need to create a measurement of Effective Leadership and Community Impact is something that must be given due attention. For this will demonstrate the broader societal impact of effective leadership by women, which will in turn justify their efforts rendered and will further boost their self-confidence to become great prime movers and purveyors of change in their respective communities.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations consider both short and long-term goals and are organized to offer a clear roadmap for implementation. These recommendations are meant to assist decision-makers and stakeholders in making well-informed decisions that will result in the creation of plans, projects, and programs that will greatly contribute to the empowerment of the Blaan indigenous women's organization.

1. The results revealed that Indigenous Peoples (IP) women require a dedicated platform to ensure their voices are heard. Despite having an Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) to represent the indigenous cultural communities in the municipality, it's clear that there is still a need for a specific platform where IP women can discuss issues pertinent to them. This would allow them to address their unique concerns, share their plans, and advocate for their interests. The researchers recommend establishing a dedicated platform for Indigenous Peoples (IP) women to ensure their voices are effectively heard. A forum may be organized where IP women can discuss matters relevant to their communities, such as cultural preservation, women's rights, and local governance to be participated by NCIP or government agencies concerning IP women. IP women would have a space to share their perspectives, develop strategic plans, and collaborate on initiatives that address their unique needs. This approach aims to foster greater inclusion and representation within the broader municipal framework.
2. To enhance their leadership skills, Indigenous Peoples (IP) women require further training in legislative processes and a deeper understanding of organizational strategies. It is crucial to build their capacity to differentiate between customary practices and broader legal frameworks. This recommendation aims to help IP women navigate the complexities of governance while maintaining respect for their unique cultural traditions.

Through targeted workshops and mentorship programs, they can develop the skills needed to effectively represent their communities, make informed decisions, and engage in municipal or regional governance with confidence.

3. There must also be a review of customary practices to remind Indigenous Peoples (IP) women of their cultural roots. During the interview, some IP women leaders exhibited limited knowledge of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP). This gap underscores the need for establishing clear policies for selecting IP women leaders in the barangays. To address this, the researchers recommend a comprehensive review and documentation of traditional practices, ensuring that IP women leaders are familiar with their cultural heritage. This will not only help preserve their unique traditions but also guide the selection process for future leaders in a way that respects and incorporates these practices. Additionally, implementing policy frameworks for choosing IP women in the barangays will ensure that leadership roles are filled by individuals who have a strong understanding of their cultural identity and the skills to represent their communities effectively.
4. To ensure clarity and effectiveness, there must be a clear distinction in the roles and functions of Indigenous Peoples (IP) women within the organization. This distinction is critical to define their responsibilities and guide their activities, helping avoid confusion or role overlap. To achieve this, the researchers recommend the following: Clearly outline the roles and functions of IP women within the organization. This should encompass both specific duties and broader responsibilities, detailing what is expected of them in their positions. Differentiate between administrative, leadership, and cultural roles to ensure each IP woman has a clear understanding of her primary focus. This segregation helps in building a more efficient structure within the organization. Provide training programs to IP women to help them excel in their defined roles. This will also foster a deeper understanding of the organization's objectives and how each role contributes to its overall success. Establish a system for regular review and feedback to ensure that the roles and functions remain relevant and effective. This will allow for adjustments and improvements as needed. By implementing these measures, IP women in the organization can fulfill their roles with confidence and clarity, leading to a more cohesive and productive environment.
5. Budget allocation is essential for supporting the mobilization and activities of Indigenous Peoples (IP) women leaders. To ensure that IP women can effectively carry out their roles and contribute to organizational goals, they need access to financial resources for transportation, training, meetings, and community projects. To address this, the following recommendations are proposed: Create specific budget lines within the organization's financial plan that are designated for IP women leaders. This ensures that resources are available for their activities without diverting funds from other essential projects. Allocate funds for training, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives to empower IP women leaders. These programs should focus on developing their leadership skills, knowledge of legislative processes, and community engagement strategies. Provide a budget for IP women leaders to organize and participate in community activities. This funding can cover expenses related to transportation, rentals, materials, and other logistical requirements. Establish a process for reviewing and adjusting the budget allocation for IP women leaders on an annual basis. This review should consider their evolving needs and the impact of their activities on the organization and community. Implement clear guidelines for managing and reporting budget expenditures. This ensures that funds are used appropriately and encourages accountability among IP women leaders. A financial literacy seminar workshop may also be considered. By adopting these recommendations, the organization can empower IP women leaders to mobilize effectively and contribute to the organization's success and the well-being of their communities.

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