

Indigenous People's Participation: A Case Study on the "Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching" Community Project

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ABSTRACT

The case study on the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project explores Indigenous People's participation and the processes that facilitate or hinder participatory development. The study was conducted to identify the context and manifestations of Indigenous People's participation in the context of a development project, and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder participatory development. The study assumes that Indigenous Peoples can make informed decisions according to what they have decided will contribute to the development and sustainability of their community and processes, such as community organizing and development partners are facilitating or hindering factors. The study collected primary data through key informant interviews and focus group discussions among Mangyan community members and project implementers who were directly engaged in the project. Community immersion and integration were also conducted, and secondary data came from a review of documents regarding the project. Based on the results of the study, Indigenous Peoples aspire to preserve their land, protect their language, and promote their culture for generations to come and this is where they are coming from in planning, organizing, and participating in development projects. Development partners facilitate participatory development practice through their years of constant engagement with community stakeholders, organizational structures and processes that allow participation, and championing the voice of the community.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples, participation, participatory development practice, preservation of culture

Introduction

Mangyan is the collective name for the Indigenous communities living in Mindoro. There are eight Indigenous communities and each has its name, language, and customs. These are Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Tau-buid, Bangon, Buhid, Hanunuo, and Ratagnon. According to Philippine Statistics (n.d.), the Mangyan comprise about 20% of the total inhabitants of Mindoro. They are one of the ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines. The Mangyans originally lived on the coast of Mindoro, but they were forced to retreat in the mountains by Spanish colonizers, and then by succeeding settlers and developers. Like most Indigenous Peoples in the world, the Mangyans are discriminated against and marginalized. Non-Mangyans believe in myths that aim to picture them as “inferior citizens” or make fun of them as human beings. There are those who believe that the Mangyan’s agricultural practice of *kaingin* or swidden farming destroys the environment, but in fact, Indigenous Peoples are noted for their respect to nature and their land. The Mangyan also experience land grabbing of their ancestral land. Other negative stories about them portray them as beggars, they have “tails” (which is the loose end part of their *ba-ag*), and they are illiterate. The last one ignores the fact that the Mangyan have their own script and poetry which continue to thrive up to this day.

The Hanunuo-Mangyan live in the southern municipalities of Oriental Mindoro, namely Roxas, Mansalay, and Bulalacao. The word *Hanunuo* means genuine in the Hanunuo-Mangyan language. They have a syllabic writing system that dates to the pre-Spanish era called *Surat Mangyan*, and *Ambahan* is their traditional poetry written in Surat Mangyan. The Surat Mangyan and *Ambahan* have complemented each other, contributing to their continued existence (Mangyan Heritage Center, n.d.). Further, they have a peoples’ organization called PHADAG or the *Pinagkausahan sa Hanunuo Daga Ginurang* which is their representative institution that they empower to decide on matters that affect them collectively.

The Mangyan Heritage Center (MHC) is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro “engaged in the preservation and promotion of the Mangyan cultural heritage” (MHC, n.d., Section About). It was established to preserve and make available to the public the Mangyan collections and documentations of anthropologist and former Dutch Missionary Priest Antoon Postma. Today, MHC is not only functioning as a library of Mangyan-related documents but also as a display center of artifacts and products. It has expanded its work to conducting Mangyan exhibits to local and international schools, churches, and institutions. MHC also conducts community projects with the Mangyan, one of which is the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching. MHC is registered in the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and an accredited NGO by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) and National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA). It is also a member of the Association of Foundations, a network of NGOs.

The Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project stems from the request of leaders and elders of the Hanunuo-Mangyan through PHADAG to preserve the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan, which are in danger of disappearing because of the strong influence of lowland culture and discrimination to the youth and the whole Mangyan community. By teaching it to Mangyan youth and communities, it hopes to keep their Indigenous writing system and poetry alive, and recognize the contribution of the Mangyan in cultural preservation.

This study, focused on Indigenous People's participation in project planning and implementation through the community project Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching, explores how and why Indigenous Peoples participate in projects, and what are the factors that facilitate or hinder participatory development. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. Present an overview and identify the context and manifestations of Indigenous People's participation;
2. Describe the participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project;
3. Identify the factors that facilitate or hinder participatory development in relation to the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project; and
4. Draw lessons on the case study and its implications for community development practice.

The study used a case study approach to gather data on the project. The primary data-gathering methods included interviews with key informants and focus group discussions (FGD). Community immersion and integration were also fundamental in the study to gain a deeper understanding on the overall situation of the Hanunuo-Mangyan and the implementation of the project. Review of documents related to the project was also done to look at the process of how the project was developed, managed, and implemented through the years. Key informant interviews were conducted with Hanunuo-Mangyan elders and cultural bearers,¹ the Executive Director, and the Head Researcher of MHC. Two FGDs were organized: one with the leaders of PHADAG and the other with the staff of MHC. Prior to the data collection activities, free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) was solicited and granted by the Hanunuo-Mangyan through PHADAG, in coordination with MHC. Data gathering was conducted in Mansalay and Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro, and San Jose, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines. Data collected from interviews and FGDs were transcribed and coded along with other textual data, such as observation notes and documents. Themes

¹ Cultural Bearers are the Hanunuo-Mangyan volunteers who implemented the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching community project as teachers.

were then generated by identifying common responses or insights pertaining to the implementation of the project and on how various actors participated in it.

For the sake of transparency, it must be declared that this article is drawn from the author's unpublished Master's thesis, completed in 2020. However, the author became involved in the project in 2012 when she assumed the position of Assistant Project Officer at the MHC through the Jesuit Volunteers Philippines. This position allowed the author to have an intimate knowledge of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Project which, at that time, was in its preliminary stages. The author left the MHC in 2013, but remained in touch with the key stakeholders of the project until the completion of her thesis.

Through this study and the researcher's privileged position, this article provides a unique account on how the Hanunuo-Mangyan participated in the conduct of the project and engaged with various actors in the process. As the article will show later, the experiences of the Hanunuo-Mangyan demonstrate their determination to protect their way of life through community organizing and participation. Apart from this, the author also hopes that this article could provide some guidance or a point of reflection for development practitioners (i.e., civil society organizations, government agencies, other support groups and the academe) engaged with Indigenous Peoples, in terms of fostering a relationship that encourages participatory, culture-sensitive, and empowering development processes and strategies.

Review of Related Literature and Conceptual Framework

Participation and empowerment are interconnected principles of community development. According to Chambers (1995), there are at least three definitions of participation. First, is a cosmetic label attached to projects to make them look good. Second, a co-opting practice to mobilize local people into providing labor and reduce costs. Finally,

an empowering process that lets local people analyze, plan, and implement their projects. In general, participation is understood as both a means and an end of development. Through people's participation in all aspects of their lives, development and transformation of unjust structures may be achieved. It is the transformative potential that participation allows that connects it with empowerment; a concept which Lane (1995) defines as "the ability of individuals to influence all decisions taken at all levels and in all spheres which affect their lives, and their capacity to initiate action to enhance their quality of life" (p. 188).

Participation as a means to achieve empowerment became the foundational claims of participatory approaches to development. According to Duraiappah et al. (2005), participatory approaches to development emerged from the realization of decision-makers to include the perspectives and priorities of local communities in decision-making, policy development and project implementation, and aspiration of local communities for bottom-up, community-level interventions. These participatory approaches to development became widely adopted, which demonstrate the growing acceptance of the idea of participation as a means for the meaningful involvement of the poor and vulnerable to the development process. In general, participatory approaches adopt the following principles (Eggers and Majeres, 1998, as cited in Duraiappah et al., 2005):

- Inclusion: All or representatives of all groups who have an interest or concern should be included in the process.
- Equal partnership: Everyone has an equal right to participate in the process regardless of his or her status in the community.
- Transparency: Processes encourage open communication and building dialogue between and among stakeholders.

- Power sharing: Everyone engaged in the process or project has equal authority and power, and no individual or group shall dominate the process or project. In the same way, responsibility and accountability is shared.
- Empowerment: All are encouraged to contribute according to their capacity; and all are engaged to foster mutual learning and empowerment.
- Cooperation: divides the group's weaknesses while sharing everybody's strength.

Degrees of Participation

While people's participation is widely seen as indispensable and its principles essential in any development endeavor, realities on the ground suggest that it is useful to think of participation in terms of degrees rather than an ideal. In seeing the degrees of participation, a differentiated perspective on who, why, and in what ways people participate can be presented. Duraiappah et al. (2005) presents nine degrees of participation ranging from manipulation to self-mobilization.

Table 1

Degrees of Participation

<i>1. Manipulation</i> Participation is undertaken in a manner contrived by those who hold power to convince the public that a predefined project or program is best.
<i>2. Passive participation</i> Participation by the local people consists of them being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is based on information provided, shared, and assessed by external "experts." Therefore, the information being shared belongs only to external experts.
<i>3. Participation in information giving</i> This is a one-way approach to participation whereby participation is by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. Participants are informed of their rights, responsibilities, and options, but are not given the opportunity to influence proceedings as the findings are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.
<i>4. Participation by consultation</i>

This is a two-way flow of information in which local people participate by being consulted and external agents listen to their views. Although participants have the opportunity to provide suggestions and express concerns, their input may or may not be used at all or as originally intended. The external agents define problems and solutions, both of which may be modified in light of the information provided by the participants. Such a consultation process does not concede any share in decision-making and professionals are under no obligation to take on people's views.

5. *Participation for material incentives*

People participate by providing resources, for example, labor, in return for food, cash, or other material incentives. Much on-farm research falls into this category, as farmers provide the fields but are not involved in experimentation or the process of learning. In this type of participation, people have no stake in prolonging activities once the incentives end.

6. *Functional participation*

People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the initiative. Local people's involvement, however, occurs after major decisions have been made rather than at an early stage in the project cycle. The established groups are dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but over time may become more self-sufficient.

7. *Interactive participation*

People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. As local people take control of the decision-making process, they gain a greater stake in maintaining the structures and practices they have established. A common drawback is that vulnerable individuals and groups tend to remain silent or passively acquiesce.

8. *Partnership*

Through negotiation, power is redistributed between local people and power holders in an equitable manner. Decision-making takes place through an exchange between equally respected participants who are working towards a common goal and seeking to optimize the well-being of all concerned. There are mutual responsibilities and risk-sharing in the planning and decision-making process.

9. *Self-mobilization/active participation*

People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice that they need but retain control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective action may or may not challenge the existing inequitable distribution of wealth or power.

Note. From "Have participatory approaches increased capabilities?" by Duraiappah, A., Roddy, P., & Parry, J., 2005. Copyright 2005 by the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

According to Duraiappah et al. (2005), what mediates the degrees of participation (from manipulation to self-mobilization) is power; specifically, how much power traditional decision makers have over peoples or communities that will be impacted by or have a direct stake on a policy, program, or project.

Indigenous People's Participation

The Indigenous Peoples' experience illustrates how their degree of participation is often indicative of the power and influence they have on development policies, programs, or projects. As Bawagan et al. (2009) has shown, government-led literacy programs—which are often blind to the needs and demands of Indigenous Peoples—had negative impacts. Bawagan et al. (2009) argued that formal education exposes young Indigenous Peoples to perspectives that could alienate them from their Indigenous culture. Meanwhile, the Department of Education (DepEd) Order 32, s. 2015 Adopting the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework, a policy which advocated for the integration of Indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices (IKSP) in formal education settings was forwarded by Indigenous Peoples themselves. Similarly, Bawagan et al. (2009) showed how Indigenous Peoples, specifically the Aeta Mag-antsi, were able to adopt and appropriate participatory planning processes by using elements that are important in their lives (i.e., ancestral domain and oral histories).

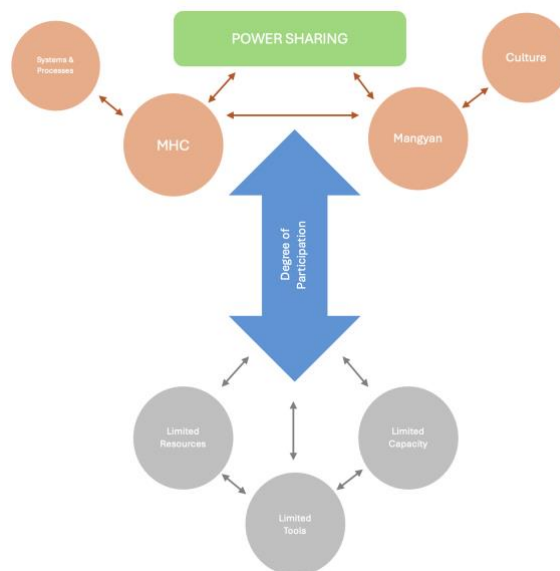
Factors That Facilitate or Hinder Participatory Development

The study of Bawagan et al. (2009) also identified intermediate processes as facilitating/hindering factors that include NGOs, whose development initiatives could either help or hinder Indigenous Peoples. NGOs are organizations that focus on social change for development. They work mainly through community organizing, advocacy, and provision of support services to the community. These development organizations are determined either as a facilitating or hindering factor by their participatory development practice. Chambers

(1995) defined the practice of participatory development as a shift of power relations, whereby traditionally dominant groups become facilitators of learning while communities are empowered to gain confidence and lead their lives. This paradigm shift has several implications for development organizations to allow for the participatory process. First is the change of culture and approaches to development organizations on participatory management and decentralization, especially prioritizing field workers. Second, community projects should emphasize processes of learning, enabling and empowering, which means that time frames of development organizations should be flexible to allow participation and change to happen. Third, Indigenous People should be the ones to lead and carry out research relating to them and the results of these research should be owned and shared by Indigenous People instead of development organizations monopolizing the information and using the people as reference. Fourth, development organizations should give way to Indigenous People to decide on the development agenda through their experiences. Finally, development organizations should refrain from using lectures in capability-building sessions for Indigenous People. Instead, processes of shared learning, peer instruction, problem-solving, and social settings should be maximized.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The review discussed how participation is interconnected to empowerment. It is both a means and an end towards the transformation of unequal structures in society. While participation is essential, this review also noted how participation is often elusive, largely because of power relations between and among actors. As the Indigenous Peoples experience has shown, top-down development projects without their participation became possible due to the power traditional decision makers have, and this often had negative effects. Thus, a paradigm shift towards a participatory process is required in development organizations that claim to support Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized and vulnerable groups. This study will look into the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project by looking at how the Mangyans participated. Specifically, the study will examine the degrees of participation of the Mangyans in the development and execution of the project. As mentioned earlier, the degrees of participation are directly related to the power and influence actors (in this case the Mangyans) have in the overall process. Using Chamber's (1995) participatory development, the study will look into the factors that may influence the degrees

of participation in the context of the structures, processes, and approaches of the Mangyans and MHC, as the project was implemented through their support, as well as relations between key actors.

The History of Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project

This section presents the history of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project. The section also presents how the project contributed to the preservation of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan tradition. It ends by discussing the roles of the Hanunuo-Mangyan, PHADAG, and MHC, who are the primary actors of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project.

The project has two main phases as shown in Figure 2, with the end goal of preserving the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan. The first phase was when Surat Mangyan and Ambahan were taught in DepEd schools for one hour once a week in every class of Grades 1 to 6. The second phase spans five years and covers three main components, namely, documentation, material development, and teaching in Mangyan communities by members who participated in the documentation and material development.

The project stems from the request of leaders and elders of the Hanunuo-Mangyans, through PHADAG, to preserve the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan by teaching it in Hanunuo-Mangyans schools and communities, which are in danger of disappearing because of the strong influence of lowland culture and discrimination on the youth and the whole Mangyan community.

According to PHADAG,

Ang proyektong pang tribong Samahang PHADAG, pinagsamang proyekto ng MHC para maisagawa 'yung pagdokumento ng Surat Mangyan. Pero ang katunayan, ang Surat Mangyan ay talagang, nung una pa man ay kaalaman na mga Mangyan 'yan ang Surat Mangyan. Nagkataon na kailangan ng ma-i-dokumento sa pamamagitan ng tulong ng MHC, pumayag naman 'yung Tribong Hanunuo, lahat kami at tsaka sa pamumuno po ng Samahang PHADAG [The project is a joint endeavor of PHADAG and MHC in documenting the Surat Mangyan. In fact, in the first place, Surat Mangyan is an Indigenous knowledge of the Mangyans. It is just that we need to document it with the help of MHC. We, Mangyans, all agreed to the project].

The project has its roots in the initiative of Antoon Postma or Bapa Antoon, as he was known. He saw the significance of the Indigenous script to the history and culture of the Mangyan and the Filipinos in general, and the need to preserve it. Bapa Antoon created a Primer on Surat Mangyan, and personally taught the script to the Mangyans along with Mangyan companions but only in limited areas. It was stopped because of limited resources and Bapa Antoon's old age. The Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project is seen as a continuation of Bapa Antoon's initiatives. As one Mangyan Cultural Bearer recalls,

Ang alam ko nagsimula talaga yan kay Bapa yung nagtrabaho pa siya bilang misyonero. Tinuturo niya naman dito dati sa mga schools dito sa elementary schools. Isa din ako sa mga naturuan. Tapos yun yung nawala na si Bapa, parang natigil yun. Tinuloy ulit ng Mangyan Heritage [What I know is that Surat Mangyan teaching started with Bapa when he was still working as a missionary. He taught it in elementary

schools here before. I was one of the learners. Then, he lied low and it was stopped. Mangyan Heritage Center is continuing it now].

Figure 2

Phases of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project



Phase one: Teaching in DepEd Schools

MHC attends the regular monthly meetings of PHADAG to be updated on their activities and endeavors. These meetings are attended by officers and community members. It is through one of these meetings that PHADAG expressed their desire for Surat Mangyan to be taught to the Mangyans, similar to the early initiative of Bapa Antoon, and hoped for MHC’s support. MHC worked on this request and PHADAG greenlit the project by giving their consent.

PHADAG identified the Hanunuo-Mangyan communities and consequently, the schools where the project will be implemented. MHC sought the endorsement of DepEd for the identified public schools to accommodate the teaching of Surat Mangyan and Ambahan during regular class hours. Thus, young Mangyans who are mostly going to school are assured of being taught. The US Embassy, Manila and Ala-Ala Foundation provided the initial grant for the implementation of the project, and an additional grant was given by the NCCA under

its School of Living Traditions (SLT) program. The teaching started in the second half of 2012 to 2015.

Meanwhile, several teaching applications with recommendations from PHADAG came to MHC as well. The Mangyan cultural bearers or teachers were selected based on several qualifications, including prior knowledge of the Surat Mangyan and proximity to the covered schools. The selected cultural bearers participated in a training workshop on the principles of Indigenous Peoples' education facilitated by DepEd and Mangyan Mission, which also has an education program. The cultural bearers prepared their modules, validated and approved by elders in their communities and other cultural bearers. MHC provided for their honorarium, transportation allowance, and resource materials.

In their assessment, the first phase of the project was implemented well because of the full support of DepEd and the Indigenous Peoples Education Office who facilitated the implementation of the project. The teachers were also vital in the early success of the project. Choosing teachers who knew Surat Mangyan and Ambahan, and were living close to schools meant there were less interruptions in teaching, even during the rainy season. Teachers were also given support in terms of providing them with resource materials, and validated and approved modules which went through the scrutiny of Mangyan leaders. However, despite its initial success, the project had a major weakness in its monitoring and evaluation (M&E), mainly due to limited human and financial resources of the MHC. This meant that M&E activities were not conducted on a regular basis, especially in communities situated in far flung areas. Funding was also limited and provided on a short-term basis. This meant that the project was implemented on a limited scale while simultaneously sourcing funds (mainly done by the MHC) so that the project can continue for another school year. There were also logistical issues. For the cultural bearers, the rainy season prevented them from going to

meetings and other project-related activities as they had to walk through difficult terrain to get to the schools.

Phase two: Documentation, Material Development, and Teaching in Mangyan Communities

The project's second phase was launched after the culmination of the first phase in 2015. One of the main assessment points of Phase 1 was that the material used for teaching—the Primer developed by Antoon Postma—needs updating. Further, this updating required the validation and approval of the Mangyan leaders and elders as there are different forms of the Mangyan script being used by community members. In the case of the Hanunuo-Mangyan, it is important that the scripts that are going to be taught reflect their identity and history. The Head Researcher, who is also a linguist, explained the documentation process of the project:

Even as a writing system...So ang writing naman ay representation lang ng speech, ng spoken language. So even naman sa spoken language, kahit parehas kayo nagsasalita ng, halimbawa, Tagalog, how you use Tagalog is different. You have different preferences sa words, different preferences sa sentences...So sa case yun nga sa documentation part, ina-acknowledge namin yung inherent diversities. So hindi kaagad namin in-assume na porket ito yung well documented form na dapat lahat sila ganun at the rest ay mali. So noong una naming meeting, hinighlight namin na yung other forms hindi po siya mali. Yun po ay akma sa konteksto ng gurangon or ng elder na gumagamit sa sitio niya at sa panahon ng ginagamit niya. Hindi po rin na sinabi nila tama nga na—kaya nung meeting na nagko-correct kami, hindi nila sinasabi na mali si ganitong elder. Kasi sa konteksto ng elder na iyon, tama siya. So ang ginagamit nila, mas gusto namin ito, so parang preference siya [Writing is just a representation of speech, of spoken language. So in spoken language, even if you

speak the same language, for example, Tagalog, how you use Tagalog is different. You have different preferences in words, different preferences in sentences...Thus, each individual manifests a different style of a particular writing system. In the case of the documentation process [of the Mangyan scripts], we acknowledge the inherent diversities. We did not immediately assume that because this is a well-documented form, the rest is wrong. During our first meeting [with the Mangyans], we made it clear that the other forms are not wrong. They are appropriate according to the context of the elder—where and when he/she uses it. We did not say that this elder is wrong because according to the context of that elder, he/she is right. In the end, the Mangyan elders choose which form they like; it became a matter of preference].

Phase 2 of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project got support from the US Embassy Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. Immediately after, a head researcher was hired to lead the documentation and primer development. For the documentation, Mangyan field researchers were chosen by the Hanunuo-Mangyans themselves then they were trained. These field researchers met with various elders and cultural bearers one-by-one to explain the project and collect data on the Surat Mangyan. When the initial set of data were ready, the elders and cultural bearers were invited to validate them. A series of meetings followed where elders and cultural bearers finalized the content of the primer. During the last validation meeting for the primer, the Hanunuo-Mangyans decided on the communities where the teaching will be implemented, as well as the cultural bearers who will teach. The cultural bearers were chosen among the community members who participated in the documentation and primer development.

Phase 2 was remarkably different from Phase 1. Unlike Phase 1, teaching was implemented in a communal setting where everyone can learn, as compared to teaching Surat Mangyan and Ambahan in a formal setting, limited only to Mangyan pupils. The selection of

teachers was also different. In Phase 2, the teachers were selected by the Mangyans themselves, and were often those who participated in the documentation and primer development process. Thus, the Mangyans had a significant role in decision-making in Phase 2 of the project. As the Head Researcher commented, “*The difference ngayon na lahat ng decision ay communal. Lahat ng changes communal. So yun yung isang mahalagang difference doon sa second part ng project* [The difference now is that all decisions [in the documentation and primer development] are communal. All changes are decided by the community. So that’s an important difference in the second phase of the project].”

The Preservation of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan

The phases of the Community Project help the Mangyans in preserving the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan by teaching it to the Mangyans, especially the youth so they could appreciate and contribute to its preservation. Additionally, the documentation made the Surat Mangyan become clearer and preserved. According to PHADAG:

Sa tingin ko, malaking pakinabang ito sa komunidad lalo higit sa pagsasalibro ng Surat Mangyan. Bagamat ang aming mga anak ay nag-aaral na sa paaralan ng mga Damoong (Tagalog) ay 'yung aming Surat Mangyan sa ganitong sistema tulungang hindi mawala kasi nga ay ang aming mga kabataan, may anim na taon pa lang, ay pinag-aral na sa paaralan ng Kristyano. Kung baga, ang ibig kong sabihin, hindi roon sa Surat Mangyan nag-aaral 'yung mga day care, kinder, kundi nandoon na sa paaralan. Ganoon man ay malaking tulong ang pagdodokumento ng Surat Mangyan sa komunidad lalo na higit sa mga matanda sa ganoong pamamaraan ay hindi malimutan ang aming kultura at aming batas—ang aming Surat Mangyan [In my opinion, the project is a great benefit to the community especially in documenting the Surat Mangyan into a book. Our children, at the early age of six, go to the schools of

the Tagalogs and Christians. What I mean is they are not taught with Surat Mangyan. Thus, it is a great help to the community to document the Surat Mangyan especially for the adults in order for our culture and laws to never be forgotten—our Surat Mangyan].

A Mangyan Elder also said,

Ang tingin ko bukod sa makaka-interest yung iba pa, dahil malinaw na kasi pag may ganitong proyekto, nagiging malinaw. Hindi pabago-bago eksakto ang mga bagay-bagay sa Surat Mangyan. Katulad noon, hindi pa masabi kung saan ba yung tama. Eh kung may tumututok sa mga nanaliksik at sa mga sumasagawa. Nagiging permanente kumbaga. Hindi pabagu-bago. Walang duda kumbaga [For me, other than people will be interested [of the Surat Mangyan]; through this project, it (Surat Mangyan) becomes clear and exact unlike before when we could not tell which is correct (form). Since there were researchers who focused (on the documentation); thus it became permanent and consistent].

Roles of Hanunuo-Mangyans and MHC in the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project

The project was initiated based on the request of Hanunuo-Mangyans, to which the MHC responded. This has led to the development and implementation of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project in two phases. As discussed earlier, the Mangyans assumed different roles and had varying degrees of participation throughout the first and second phases of the project. In the first phase, the participation of the Mangyans was limited and their decisions coursed through PHADAG. PHADAG was consulted on which schools the project will be implemented at and on the recruitment of the Mangyan cultural bearers who will teach the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan. Following the definition of

Duraiappah et al. (2005), the participation of the Mangyan in Phase 1 could be described as passive. Meanwhile, the cultural bearers who implemented the project participated in a functional way, mainly through teaching the Mangyan script following the principles of Indigenous People's education.

However, the participation of the Mangyans became more significant in the second phase as they participated in the documentation of the Surat Mangyan either as participants or by becoming field researchers. The Mangyans also assumed a significant role in the validation and approval of the results of the documentation and primer development process. Using Duraiappah et al. (2005), the participation of the Mangyans in this phase could be described as a partnership where Mangyans and the MHC are involved in the decision-making processes and have their own responsibilities.

It must be noted, however, that throughout this process, the MHC assumed a facilitative role. The MHC performed this role by adopting a community-based approach where the Head Researcher advocated for making and utilizing spaces for the Mangyans to participate in. In general, the role of MHC in the community project is to provide support in terms of administrative, logistics and coordination with external partners and the Mangyan. The Mangyans, on the other hand, are the decision-makers of the output, which is the primer, and where and who will implement the teaching of the community project.

Analysis: Factors That Facilitate or Hinder Participatory Development

In the previous section, this study presented the implementation of the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project, and how the Mangyans participated throughout the process. This section briefly discusses the various factors that facilitated or hindered the participation of Mangyans in the project.

To ensure the survival and way of life of their community, the Mangyans initiated the revival and participated in the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Community Project. Their intention to participate comes from ensuring their Indigenous knowledge systems and practices are sustained and their Indigenous identity is upheld well into the next generation. The Mangyan, feeling the increasing influence of lowland culture on their youth and the whole community, to which they are regularly exposed to, decided that promoting and preserving their Indigenous script and poetry through teaching is an urgent issue. According to one PHADAG representative,

Sa tingin ko, malaking pakinabang ito sa komunidad lalo higit sa pagsasalibro ng Surat Mangyan. Bagamat ang aming mga anak ay nag-aaral na sa paaralan ng mga Damoong (Tagalog) ay 'yung aming Surat Mangyan sa ganitong sistema tulungang hindi mawala kasi nga ay ang aming mga kabataan, may anim na taon pa lang, ay pinag-aral na sa paaralan ng Kristyano. Kung бага, ang ibig kong sabihin, hindi roon sa Surat Mangyan nag-aaral 'yung mga day care, kinder, kundi nandoon na sa paaralan. Ganoon man ay malaking tulong ang pagdodokumento ng Surat Mangyan sa komunidad lalo na higit sa mga matanda sa ganoong pamamaraan ay hindi malimutan ang aming kultura at aming batas—ang aming Surat Mangyan [In my opinion, the project is a great benefit to the community especially in documenting the Surat Mangyan into a book. Our children, at the early age of six, go to the schools of the Tagalogs and Christians. What I mean is they are not taught with Surat Mangyan. Thus, it is a great help to the community to document the Surat Mangyan especially for the adults for our culture and laws to never be forgotten—our Surat Mangyan].

PHADAG performed an instrumental role as it facilitated the development and implementation of the project. PHADAG also highlighted the capacity of Indigenous Peoples to organize, and act on matters that affect the Mangyans collectively. While the Hanunuo-

Mangyans have community leaders and elders who decide on the immediate concerns of their communities, PHADAG is their people's organization and representative institution with leaders and systems to guide how they would conduct their responsibilities. Through PHADAG, discussions on the community project between and among the Mangyans, and between MHC and the Mangyans were facilitated.

The Mangyans were motivated to participate because of their Indigenous planning process, leadership structures, culture and identity. Through their Indigenous knowledge and practices, the Mangyans were able to engage in project design, planning, and implementation, emphasizing that consultations with fellow Mangyans is an indispensable process. As such, community members should express their opinions and suggestions during planning and reflect on whether the project will truly benefit the community. Similarly, community leaders are made accountable and are expected to attend regular meetings to contribute to the decisions made by PHADAG, and subsequently cascade them to the Mangyan at large.

However, they have inherent challenges, such as their limited tools for self-understanding and resources. For instance, although they saw the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan as important parts of their culture and identity, the Mangyans lacked the technical know-how to preserve them. Bapa Antoon initiated the preservation systematically through modern methods, formal education, and documentation through a primer. He taught the Surat Mangyan in elementary schools within the Mangyan community to reach the youth, ensuring that the next generations will still be able to know them. Building on Bapa Antoon's initiative without this technical knowledge and external resources would have been very challenging for the Mangyans.

Besides these technical limitations, participation was also affected by the project's perceived importance in relation to other concerns or issues in the community. As shown in

Phase 1 of the project, this led MHC to take on a more active role. According to one Mangyan elder,

Mas active po yung MHC kung tutuusin kasi ang mga Mangyan, parang hindi naman ganoon katutok. Kung sa kanila pa ay parang yung ang [interest] kulturang sa sulat ay baka kung paano gamitin, baka kung ganyan-ganyan at mga duda-duda lang. Yung interest talaga ang kanilang culture na baka sabihin nito ay magamit lang ng ilan o sila-sila lang. Yung pagtuturo mismo, hindi pa ganon sila [I have observed that MHC is much more active (in the project) than the Mangyan as it seems that the latter is not as focused on it. The Mangyan are more mindful of how the script is being used; there are some doubts perhaps. The interest of the Mangyan is for our culture to not be used by some only. As for the teaching itself, I think the majority is not concerned].

PHADAG explained their limitations,

Ay, mayroon pa po. May mga kakulangan talaga ang Samahang PHADAG una nga ay hindi trabaho kundi ay sakripisyo sa aming tribo. Kasi ang lahat ng pamunuhan dito ay kusang tumataya ng kanilang sarili para lang magkaisa kaming tribo sa pamumuno ng kaukulang walang bayad. Nagtitiis kaming itaguyod ang lahat ng aming katribo sa Samahan [PHADAG lacks in many ways especially because this is not a job but a sacrifice of the leaders for the tribe. All leaders are willing to risk themselves so that we, as a tribe, can unite. We are committed to encouraging all our community members to the organization].

With the learning from the earlier initiative of Bapa Antoon and the consistently increasing influence of lowland culture on their youth and the whole community, the Mangyans sought the support of MHC, which has been a constant presence among the Mangyans through its various projects and activities with them through the years. Bawagan

et al. (2009) described NGOs and other support groups as intermediate processes that either facilitate or hinder Indigenous Peoples planning processes. To describe whether they facilitate or hinder Indigenous Peoples, Chambers' (1995) definition of participatory development and its implications for development organizations provide useful insights.

In the project, the strength of MHC as a partner organization of the Mangyan comes from its organizational mission, and systems and processes that allow it to tap and provide resources and technical support to the project through its networks and accreditation from different government bodies supporting its legitimacy. MHC has its years of engagement with the Mangyan as well, through constant consultations, regular attendance in the meetings of the peoples' organizations, and actual fieldwork which established trust and partnership between them, resulting in various culture-based programs and projects.

Another facilitating factor underscored in the project is the champions of participatory development. They are the figures with expertise and experience, as well as the influence to spearhead projects and ensure its success. If the earlier initiative had Bapa Antoon and his Mangyan companions, in this project, these are the Head Researcher, who advocated for a community-based approach in the research of Indigenous languages influencing MHC to take a more facilitator role in the second phase of the project, and MHC Mangyan staff, who provided the context of the programs and projects, and ensured their relevance to the community. The Mangyan staff also work on MHC's community organizing efforts. At the same time, they encourage the Mangyan to give their buy-in on the programs and projects of MHC. The staff members were at the forefront of the implementation of the project as direct implementers, whether as cultural bearers, field researchers, or in-charge of administrative and logistical support. From the perspective of the Mangyan, these staff members represent the community to the organization. The Mangyan staff of MHC embodies empowerment as they are members of both the community and the organization that aims to support the

development of their own community. With this, they become the bridge that connects the NGO to the communities. According to PHADAG:

Ang MHC po ay, nung una pa lang, ay kasama na sa pagpupulong kasi nga po ang manggagawa ng MHC ay... sila po may dugong Hanunuo rin kaya po sila po ay iniimbata namin tuwing magka-regular meeting ang PHADAG. Kaya kung ako ang tanungin, parang kasama sa pagpakabalantas ang proyekto na 'yun kasi kasama sila

[MHC has consistently been present to us since the beginning because of the staff who are Hanunuo-Mangayans. We would invite them to every meeting of PHADAG. So if you ask me, we are included in the project because of them].

All these echo Chamber's (1995) insights that for development organizations to be facilitators of participatory development, there should first and foremost be an intentional culture and approach towards it, by placing organizational structures and processes that facilitate participation of community stakeholders, albeit at varying degrees, in different aspects of the organization.

Nevertheless, NGOs, especially small and local like MHC, require capacity building and resource support to implement their work. Technical, human, and financial resources are needed to implement projects. From research and documentation, to teaching and publication, they all require hiring people and incurring different expenses, especially a participatory development process that takes time and numerous activities. This is where MHC's organizational systems and processes, otherwise known as professionalization, come to their advantage. MHC has policies on human resources, finance, and administration needed in managing the organization, which also results in accountability and transparency. These comply with government reportorial requirements, and allowed MHC to build its credibility

and network, which resulted in partners and donors supporting its programs and projects ultimately benefiting the Mangyan. Nevertheless, they need ongoing capacity building and resource support to continue improving their organizational systems, processes, and capacity, such as project monitoring and evaluation to strengthen effectiveness and sustainability, and improve the quality and outcomes of projects. The process is iterative and is mutually enforcing to other factors on participatory development.

Hence, revisiting Chambers' (1995) definition of participatory development as a shift of power relations; whereby traditionally dominant groups become facilitators of learning while communities are empowered to gain confidence and lead their lives. In the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project, we see that both Mangyan and MHC actors have innate structures, processes, and approaches that facilitate their participation and empowerment, though both are in need of continuous capacity building and improvement in understanding to allow for an increasing degree of participation resulting to shared power. MHC already has a base from their mission and years of engagement with the Mangyans that facilitates trust and partnership. However, they need a consistent learning process and further capacity building to allow for the active and increased degree of participation of the Mangyans in their projects and organization. For the Mangyans, it is through the iterative process of learning by participating coupled with their Indigenous processes and capacity building to increase their tools for self-understanding so they can push for an increased degree of participation in projects, activities, and initiatives that impact them. Perhaps, it is the varying degree of participation by both actors in different phases and activities of the project that contribute to its effectiveness and sustainability supported by its various strengths.

Conclusion

This study on the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan Teaching Community Project hopes to understand Indigenous People's participation and the factors that either facilitate or hinder participatory development.

The goal of development is to build empowered and self-reliant communities. The rights of Indigenous Peoples remain unsecured even with international and national instruments. Indigenous Peoples continue to face serious threats in their lives, such as underdevelopment, discrimination, and exploitation. Overall, Indigenous Peoples aspire to preserve their land, protect their language, and promote their culture for generations to come. The project confirms the capability of Indigenous Peoples to make informed decisions and organize for the sustainability of their community (i.e., PHADAG as their people's organization where discussions between and among community members and external actors take place). The Mangyan felt the increasing influence of lowland culture and discrimination on their youth and the whole community that promoting and preserving their Indigenous script could not be less than urgent if they are to keep alive their Indigenous culture and community for generations to come. The project hopes to encourage appreciation and recognize the contribution of the Mangyan in cultural preservation, challenging the discrimination against them and their marginalization as "illiterate" and "inferior" human beings.

The study also highlights good practices of participatory development by NGOs: years of constant engagement with community stakeholders, organizational structures and processes that allow participation, and the preferential option to the voice of the community. All of these develop an NGO practice that is rooted in the context and perspective of

communities, and continuous organizational development and strengthening help NGOs become a facilitating factor of community development.

The study contributed literature in understanding Indigenous People's participation and has provided insights on development work with Indigenous Peoples. The good practices of participatory development that were shared are relevant not only to NGOs, but also to the government and other support groups working with Indigenous Peoples.

Moving forward, this study proposes similar research focusing on government, private organizations or international development organizations or mechanisms working with Indigenous Peoples to supplement the literature on participatory development practice. The study also suggests an evaluation of the community project including the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of teaching the Surat Mangyan and Ambahan in a formal school setting compared to in communities, as well as the role and function of PHADAG and MHC. Further studies on Indigenous Peoples such as community dynamic and structures of power vis-à-vis participation, and the process of identity construction among its youth that considers not only thoughts and experiences on lowland culture and discrimination, but also sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression also adds in understanding intersectionality in development and gender equality and social inclusion.

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