

Revitalizing culture and economy of Hanunuo Mangyan: A strategic community development program

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous people are recognized as bearers of cultural heritage and stewards of the world's biodiversity, yet they remain among the most marginalized, often facing poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, discrimination, and exploitation. Despite numerous interventions, the absence of targeted, evidence-based approaches has limited their effectiveness. The study aims to formulate a strategic community development program for the Hanunuo indigenous community. This study, conducted in the Philippines, where indigenous groups experience marginalization, armed conflict, land dispossession, and environmental degradation, employed a qualitative ethnographic design to gather baseline data for informed policy-making and strategic community development. Using community immersion, participatory observation, interviews, and focus group discussions with the Hanunuo indigenous community of southern Oriental Mindoro, the research identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to identify key areas for improvement. Findings revealed that tourism, industry, agriculture, and culture hold high development potential, whereas education and governance need urgent interventions. These findings were presented in a TOWS matrix by Wehrich to facilitate strategy formulation for each sector and were subsequently used to develop a strategic community development plan in the project's second phase. This research offers valuable benchmarks for government agencies, higher education institutions, and non-government organizations involved in indigenous community development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples (IPs), with their rich histories, diverse cultures, and unique languages, have deep connections to their ancestral lands (World Bank, 2024). This connection shapes their governance systems and informs their environmental practices. Their knowledge, often passed down through oral traditions, rituals, and ceremonies, has proven to be effective for resource management (Bawagan, 2009; UN DESA, 2024), sometimes even outperforming state-managed conservation systems.

However, despite their vital contributions to cultural and environmental sustainability, Indigenous Peoples often face significant challenges. Marginalization, poverty, displacement, and environmental degradation are common, largely due to the impacts of historical colonization, industrial development, and globalization (United Nations [UN], 2010; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2024).

In the Philippines, there are approximately 14 to 17 million Indigenous Peoples, constituting about 10% to 20% of the population, with 112 ethnolinguistic groups (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). In Region IV-MIMAROPA, approximately 700,000 IPs reside, including nearly 100,000 Mangyan. The Mangyan consists of eight sub-groups, whose livelihoods rely on agriculture, forest management, and a deep understanding of ecological practices (United Nations - Food and Agriculture Organization [UN-FAO], 2020). Kinship and group identity play a crucial role in community decision-

making, with customary laws guiding their social interactions. Elders maintain and share this intergenerational knowledge (Chua et al., 2019).

Among the Mangyan, the Hanunuo and Buhid sub-groups preserve ancestral scripts, such as Surat Hanunuo Mangyan and Surat Buhid Mangyan, which are among the few remnants of pre-colonial writing in the Philippines (Postma, 1968; Postma, 1971). The Ambahan, a seven-syllable poetic chant, is written in these scripts and carries significant cultural, social, and ecological insights (Postma, 1989). However, these traditions are increasingly at risk as younger generations engage less with them, underscoring the need for concerted preservation efforts. Effective development hinges on strategic planning and clear communication that honors local needs and utilizes context-specific knowledge (Reindrawati, 2023; Neth et al., 2013). Such efforts prioritize sustainable processes, bolster social cohesion and enhance environmental stewardship (Bamba et al., 2021).

This study uses a SWOT analysis to identify the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, faced by the community (Benzaghta et al., 2021). While previous research on Mangyan culture, language, and ecological knowledge has focused on cultural preservation, few studies have examined the relationship between cultural preservation and economic development and participatory planning. This study addresses existing gaps by transforming cultural knowledge from a passive subject of preservation into a strategic community asset, operationalized through participatory SWOT analysis and an integrated culturally responsive community development program tailored to the Hanunuo Mangyan context.

Modernization is often associated with the belief that cultural heritage is a barrier to development, a view that has contributed to the erosion of many historic and Indigenous landscapes. However, heritage conservation, when valued and supported, can in fact serve as a powerful driver of development (Cruz, 2017). Drawing from this perspective, the study contributes a culturally grounded community development program designed for Indigenous contexts. The findings highlight the central role of community participation in strengthening self-determination, reinforcing cultural identity, and supporting environmental stewardship (Dawson, 2021). By linking cultural preservation with sustainable livelihoods, the study provides practical insights for policymakers, academic institutions, and development practitioners, while offering a model adaptable to other Indigenous communities pursuing culturally grounded development.

This study is guided by the community development model of Phillips and Pittman (2026), which views development as a collaborative process in which communities build on their own strengths, strengthen relationships, and work with external partners to create lasting change. Using this approach, the study applies a SWOT analysis to understand the community's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats in their environment to ensure that the proposed interventions were responsive to actual community conditions (Benzaghta et al., 2021). Strengths highlight what the community can build on, weaknesses show areas needing support, opportunities reveal favorable conditions for growth, and threats point to potential challenges that must be managed. SWOT is an effective tool for strategic planning and policy development. Strengths and opportunities enable growth, while weaknesses and threats require management strategies (Meylanzharie et al., 2025).

The insights from the SWOT analysis are then translated into practical strategies using the TOWS matrix by Wehrich (1982). This tool helps turn information into action by connecting internal and external factors: SO strategies use strengths to seize opportunities, ST strategies apply strengths to manage threats, WO strategies address weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities, and WT strategies focus on reducing vulnerabilities and avoiding risks. Through participatory planning, shared learning, and knowledge co-creation, this approach strengthens community organizations, supports sustainable livelihoods, and helps preserve indigenous knowledge, ultimately fostering a resilient and culturally rooted model of local development (Wulandari et al., 2025; Arif et al., 2025; Phillips & Pittman, 2026). The study aims to formulate a strategic community development program for the Hanunuo indigenous community that will serve as an extension program of the university. Specifically, it seeks to identify the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, determine appropriate strategies using the TOWS matrix, and formulate a community development program for the university's research, development, innovation, and extension unit.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Design

This study sought to design a holistic community development program aimed at revitalizing and sustaining the Hanunuo Mangyan indigenous community in Southern Luzon, Philippines. To achieve this, the researchers employed an ethnographic approach that emphasizes close engagement with the community to understand its social structures, cultural practices, and daily experiences in context. Through participant observation, interviews, and immersion in community activities, the study captured peoples lived experiences from their own perspectives, allowing the researchers to interpret social interactions, traditions, and

challenges as the community members themselves perceive them (Liang, 2022). This approach not only provided a rich, nuanced understanding of the community's needs and priorities but also ensured that any proposed interventions were grounded in local realities, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the community's values and aspirations.

2.2. Setting, Population, and Sampling

The study was conducted in Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. Mansalay, a second-class municipality, has the highest proportion of indigenous peoples in the province, with IPs making up about 33% of its population (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2020). The municipality also records the highest prevalence of severely underweight and stunted preschool children. Panaytayan, identified as a geographically isolated and disadvantaged area (Department of Social Welfare and Development – MIMAROPA [DSWD MIMAROPA], 2023), is inhabited by the Hanunuo, one of the eight Mangyan subgroups.

Four sitios with a total population of 551 were selected as the study sites. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling using the following criteria: willingness to participate, ability to communicate in Filipino, age of at least 40 years, and involvement in the community's decision-making body. Participants aged 40 and above were selected because they act as the community's cultural bridge and hold generational memories (Eades, 2021; Cox et al., 2021; Berkes, 2018). Eighteen individuals met these qualifications and were included in the study.

2.3. Research Instrument

To gather the needed data, the study employed a multifaceted approach to instrumentation that prioritized both systematic rigor and cultural sensitivity. At the core of the field observations was an observation matrix adapted from Liang (2022), which served as a structured guide to ensure that environmental and social interactions were recorded with consistency and depth. This was complemented by interview and focus group discussion (FGD) guides, which were purposefully developed to facilitate open dialogue. To ensure these tools were both accurate and contextually appropriate, they underwent a formal validation process by three experts before being used in the field.

Recognizing that ethnography relies heavily on the researcher's own perspective, the study also utilized community immersion as a primary "living" instrument. By spending significant time within the community, the researchers moved beyond the role of external observers to become active participants in daily life. This immersion allowed for a more organic and genuine partnership with community members, ensuring that the data gathered through the validated guides and observation matrix was grounded in a firsthand, culturally responsive understanding of the Hanunuo Mangyan way of life.

2.4. Data Collection and Integration

Ethnographic research draws on a wide range of data sources and uses multiple techniques to gather information (Chand, 2025), which means that collecting, analyzing, and presenting data are closely interconnected processes (Creswell, 2007). In this study, data were gathered through observation, guided interviews, and focus group discussions (Belém et al., 2020). To keep observations organized and thorough, an observation matrix adapted from Liang (2022) was used. The interview and FGD guides were reviewed by three experts to ensure their accuracy and relevance.

A rich and detailed understanding of cultural experiences can only be developed through fieldwork, where the researchers spend significant time within the community, gaining a deeper connection and genuine partnership with community members (Ramey et al., 2025). Fieldwork transitions researchers from external observers to integral community members (Turin et al., 2021). Immersion is important in community-centered research for cultural understanding through in-depth engagement and culturally responsive strategies (Kandasamy et al., 2024). Guided by these principles, the researchers engaged in community immersion throughout the data collection period, combining participatory observation with interviews and focus group discussions.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical research practices, the researcher followed these protocols: obtaining permission from the institution to conduct the study, securing approval from the local government unit, the indigenous people's affairs office, and the military unit to visit the community, and gaining consent from community leaders to conduct interviews. Throughout the study, the researcher prioritized informed consent from participants and ensured confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, privacy, security, and safety.

2.6. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Liang's (2022) five-stage ethnographic model. This analytical approach involved data organization, conceptual categorization, category refinement, thematic grouping, and pattern interpretation (Liang, 2022).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed: triangulation of multiple data sources, clear disclosure of the researcher's positionality, member checking with participants to confirm interpretations, and the use of detailed field notes throughout the process. The study also underwent peer evaluation through the agency's internal review to further strengthen the rigor of the research.

3. RESULTS

3.1. SWOT Analysis

Table 1 shows the strengths and weaknesses of the community, along with the opportunities and threats that shape its development.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
S1: Stunning natural landscapes for eco-cultural tourism	W1: Limited access to basic, social, and health services (esp. maternal care)
S2: Potential for sustainable livelihood through nature-based tourism	W2: No formal association for weavers
S3: Abundant indigenous raw materials for weaving/handicrafts	W3: Cultural transmission declining as elders prioritize livelihood
S4: Thriving <i>Ramit</i> weaving industry	W4: Youth show reduced interest in cultural preservation
S5: Rich cultural heritage (<i>Surat Mangyan, Ambahan</i> , Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices or IKSP)	W5: Vulnerable to climate change, extreme weather
S6: Vast agroforestry potential (40,000 ha, 300–900 MASL)	W6: Lacks production technology
S7: Strong social cohesion via customary laws and traditional justice	W7: Low literacy among elders affects social and livelihood opportunities
S8: Access to education through schools and professional teachers	W8: Cultural heritage remains undocumented, with limited awareness of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) and Gender and Development (GAD) frameworks.
Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
O1: Support from LGU, NGAs, NGOs, and private individuals	T1: Inaccessible roads hinder the transport of goods
O2: Part of UNDP's Mindoro Biodiversity Corridor Project	T2: No electricity source for processing and production
O3: Mindoro State University support through R&D, innovation, extension	T3: Slash-and-burn farming causes deforestation, erosion, fire, and watershed damage
O4: Presence of municipal museum and heritage center	T4: Unfair trade practices exploit locals
O5: Cargo port and proximity to domestic airport (2 hrs)	T5: Mainstream curriculum undermines cultural preservation
O6: Rising demand for organic produce	T6: Insurgency poses risks to safety and development

From the fieldwork, it was clear that the community takes pride in its natural beauty, abundant resources, rich cultural traditions, and strong sense of unity. These strengths highlight their great potential for eco-cultural tourism, which may improve livelihoods while promoting sustainability, cultural preservation, responsible resource management, and people-centered development.

At the same time, the community faces challenges. Limited access to essential services, outdated production and processing technologies, the absence of cultural preservation policies, and limited opportunities for capacity building constrain the implementation of development initiatives and slow overall progress.

Despite these challenges, there are promising opportunities that the community can leverage. Potential linkages with various sectors may open opportunities for partnerships and external support. Emerging economic prospects associated with the roll-on/roll-off terminal, cargo port, and nearby airport, along with increasing demand for organic and heirloom crops, can strengthen local production and improve income generation. Moreover, the presence of a museum and cultural heritage center in the municipality provides a platform for preserving traditions, promoting cultural awareness, and sustaining heritage for future generations.

However, external factors continue to pose significant risks. These include poor road inaccessibility, peace and order concerns, limited market access, land degradation, acculturation pressures from mainstream curriculum, and ongoing insurgency and land disputes. These conditions negatively affect mobility, economic opportunities, environmental sustainability, cultural integrity, and access to basic needs.

3.2. Appropriate Strategies

Building on the insights generated from the SWOT analysis, the next step is to translate these diagnostic findings into concrete and actionable directions for the proposed development program. While the SWOT analysis systematically identified the program's internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats, it does not, on its own, prescribe how these factors should be strategically aligned. To address this, the TOWS matrix is employed as a strategic planning tool that synthesizes internal and external conditions to generate responsive strategies. Through the formulation of SO, WO, ST, and WT strategies, the TOWS matrix enables the program to leverage its strengths to capitalize on opportunities, address weaknesses by harnessing external support, mitigate potential threats, and enhance overall program resilience and sustainability.

Based on the TOWS matrix presented, the maxi-maxi strategy is to invest in the community's natural and cultural heritage, using what it already does well and matching it with new opportunities. The community's breathtaking landscapes, generations of traditions, and thriving local crafts such as Ramit weaving are not only sources of pride but also powerful tools for development. These strengths can be brought together with opportunities such as the UNDP's Mindoro Biodiversity Corridor Project, better transport access through the cargo port and nearby airport, and the growing demand for organic and heirloom products. By building these connections, the community can create meaningful eco-cultural tourism, open more livelihood opportunities, and ensure that cultural knowledge is passed on to the next generation, all while caring for and managing its natural resources responsibly [Table 2].

Table 2. TOWS Matrix

Maxi-Maxi	Maxi-mini
Investing in natural and cultural heritage O2, O5, O6 x S1, S2, S3, S4, S5	Collaboration for cultural preservation O1, O3, O4 x W2, W3, W4, W8
Mini-Maxi	Mini-mini
Sustainable crop production T1, T2, T3, T4 x S6, S7, S8	Strong policies and inclusive programs T5, T6 x W1, W5, W6, W7

To take advantage of the external opportunities while addressing existing weaknesses, the community can draw strength from its many supporters, local government units, national agencies, NGOs, private partners, and the nearby university. These stakeholders provide opportunities to address key gaps, such as the absence of a formal weavers' association, the decline in cultural transmission due to shifting livelihood priorities, and the waning interest of youth in cultural heritage. By working together, they can support artisans through organized groups, create opportunities for youth to engage with cultural traditions, and document indigenous knowledge before it fades. The presence of the municipal museum and heritage center offers a space for preserving and showcasing the indigenous culture.

Although the community faces real challenges, such as limited technology, reliance on traditional farming, and scarce resources, it can still capitalize on the vast opportunities in agroforestry and education. With 40,000 hectares of land suited for agroforestry, the community can shift toward sustainable crop production, reducing dependence on slash-and-burn farming that harms the environment. Schools and professional teachers can be partners in teaching climate-smart agriculture, while customary laws and traditional justice systems can guide fair resource sharing and collective responsibility. By embracing new techniques while holding onto strong traditions of unity, the community can ensure food security, create fairer livelihood opportunities, and protect the land for future generations.

The community faces critical challenges in areas where internal weaknesses and external threats overlap, highlighting the need for strong and inclusive policies. Limited access to basic services, especially maternal health care, along with low literacy among elders and the lack of production technology, constrain both well-being and livelihood opportunities. These issues call for policies that bring health, education, and appropriate technologies closer to the community while respecting indigenous knowledge and integrating practical innovations. At the same time, vulnerability to climate change underscores the importance of climate-adaptive farming, disaster preparedness, and sustainable resource management. The marginalization of indigenous culture in mainstream education further necessitates the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) to sustain cultural identity among younger generations. Strengthening peace and order is also essential to ensure a stable environment where development can take root. Overall, collaboration and responsive policymaking, grounded in stakeholder engagement, can better address these complex challenges, promote transparency and accountability, and ensure equitable outcomes, making development a shared effort to safeguard the community's health, culture, security, and future.

3.3. Proposed Community Development Program

In consideration of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, a 5-year community development plan was formulated to serve as the university's institutional research, development, and extension initiative. The *Awati TI-KAPE* community development program focuses on the areas with the highest potential for development and the aspect that needs intervention the most. The program aims for the holistic development of the Hanunuo in Panaytayan, Mansalay, Oriental Mindoro. The word *Awati* is a *Hanunuo* term meaning *bayanihan* or communal unity, while the TI-KAPE stands for the program's priority projects such as *turismo* (tourism), *industriya* (industry), *kultura* (culture), *agrikultura* (agriculture), *pamamahala* (governance), and *edukasyon* (education).

The project for tourism - Women Empowerment for Comprehensive, Adaptable, and Resilient Eco-cultural Tourism (WE CARE) will provide interventions for packaging eco-cultural tourism, highlighting the role of women as culture bearers. By providing capacity building on women in tour guiding, home stay hosting, heirloom food handling, and maternal health awareness, the project aims to provide equal livelihood opportunities for women as well as provide a safe environment for them.

Project RaMIT (Revitalization and Modernization of Indigenous Textile) is the proposed project for the industry. The project will facilitate the creation of a weavers' association, provide capacity building on handloom weaving, natural dye processing, natural fiber sources processing, and the establishment of a community-based weaving center.

To preserve the cultural heritage, particularly the *Surat Mangyan*, *Ambahan*, *Batas Mangyan*, and other indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices, a *Hanunuo-Mangyan* School of Living Traditions will be established. A non-formal school to be led by cultural masters will teach *Hanunuo* children to ensure that their cultural heritage will live on.

The project for agriculture, entitled Agricultural and Entrepreneurial Interventions (Project AgrEI), will provide targeted interventions that include financial literacy, good agricultural practices, farm management, heirloom seeds germination, and nursery management. Post-harvest processing will also be given appropriate intervention.

To ensure good governance and provide awareness of basic human rights, civil rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and other social rights awareness, Project MANGYAN (Multi-faceted Approach: Nurturing the Grassroots-driven Governance Yielding for Adaptable and Noble Leadership) will be implemented. This project will also help in the documentation of *Batas Mangyan* and provide capacity building among community leaders in good governance, ordinance, and proposal formulation.

Lastly, to tackle challenges related to illiteracy among elders, Project ARAL (Adaptability and Resiliency through Awareness and Literacy) will conduct basic literacy and numeracy drives as well as climate change awareness, hygiene and sanitation, biodiversity conservation, ethnomathematics, and ethnomedicine documentation.

The *Awati Ti-KAPE* community development aims to improve community well-being through sustainable eco-cultural tourism, a resilient Indigenous textile industry, cultural heritage preservation, enhanced heirloom coffee production, the establishment of community-based associations, and a literacy drive and awareness campaign.

4. DISCUSSION

The SWOT analysis reveals that the Hanunuo Mangyan community possesses strong internal assets that can achieve sustainable development. Their rich cultural heritage, such as the syllabic script, *Ambahan* poetry, *Ramit* weaving, music, and handicrafts, alongside a well-preserved natural environment and strong social cohesion, provides a solid foundation for eco-cultural tourism. This approach offers opportunities to generate livelihoods, conserve biodiversity, and promote cultural appreciation while keeping development community-centered (Guri et al., 2020; Hamza, 2025; Tabay-Rivera, 2024). However, tourism must be approached with caution, as it may also lead to cultural commodification, unequal distribution of benefits, environmental degradation, and land conflicts if poorly managed (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Thus, participatory policies on cultural preservation and natural resource management are critical to ensuring that development remains equitable and culturally grounded.

Beyond tourism, agriculture strengthens the community's development potential. Heirloom and organic crops present viable opportunities for niche markets, supporting both income generation and cultural preservation (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Bairagi et al., 2020). Organic farming further enhances soil health, biodiversity, and resilience, aligning with sustainable agriculture goals (Kumar Srivastava & Kumar, 2022; Tiwari, 2023; Kaur, 2023). However, these opportunities are constrained by structural weaknesses, including limited access to basic services, inadequate infrastructure, lack of technology, limited capacity-building, and weak cultural policies, challenges that are often intensified by geographic isolation (Mallillin & Santos-Regal, 2021; World Bank, 2018).

External opportunities provide pathways to address these constraints. Infrastructure such as the roll-on, roll-off terminal, cargo port, and nearby airport can improve connectivity, expand market access, and enhance service delivery, with evidence showing their positive impact on incomes and social outcomes (Francisco & Helble, 2017; Francisco & Tanaka, 2019). Increasing demand for organic and heirloom products further strengthens economic prospects (Luza, 2023), while cultural institutions such as museums and heritage centers support preservation and awareness (Britwum et al., 2022). At the same time, strong partnerships with local government units, national agencies, NGOs, private sector actors, and academic institutions offer critical support systems to address internal gaps. These collaborations can facilitate the formation of artisan groups, promote youth engagement in cultural practices, and document indigenous knowledge before it is lost, while also strengthening awareness of key legal frameworks such as IPRA and GAD (Cruz et al., 2024; De la Cruz, 2022; UNDP, 2021).

Despite these opportunities, significant threats remain. Poor road infrastructure limits mobility and access to markets and services (Yu et al., 2024), while peace and order concerns discourage investment and disrupt development (Nierras, 2022). Limited market access and land degradation constrain livelihoods and sustainability (Yar & Zaiza, 2024), while cultural erosion, driven by mainstream education and weak policy integration, threatens indigenous identity (De Guzman, 2024; Lubis et al., 2024). Insurgency and land disputes further compound these challenges by disrupting livelihoods and restricting access to essential services (Rosy, 2020; Ecaldre, 2025).

These overlapping weaknesses and threats highlight the need for targeted and inclusive policy interventions. Expanding access to healthcare, education, and appropriate technologies is essential to improving well-being and productivity. Climate vulnerability further necessitates climate-adaptive farming, disaster preparedness, and sustainable resource management. Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) into education can help counter cultural erosion and strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer (Colicol, 2024; Flores et al., 2025), while strengthened peace and order policies are necessary to create a stable environment for development (Beath et al., 2025; Nierras et al., 2022; Pancho & Bercilla, 2025).

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of collaborative and inclusive policymaking. Engaging multiple stakeholders enables more responsive, transparent, and equitable solutions to complex development challenges (Ilhami, 2023). In this context, development becomes a shared responsibility, one that safeguards health, culture, security, and long-term sustainability.

Guided by these insights, the proposed program delivers targeted interventions to strengthen both cultural identity and livelihood opportunities. The establishment of a community-based eco-cultural tourism center provides a platform for cultural promotion and income generation, while capacity-building initiatives in agriculture, governance, and resource management enhance sustainability (Houaga et al., 2023). Technology transfer further improves production efficiency and market reach, positioning heirloom crops and indigenous crafts within broader value chains. Organizational support from the community, local government, academe, and partner institutions is critical in driving transformational and sustainable change (Cruz, 2024; Houaga et al., 2023).

The experience of Vigan offers a relevant parallel to these efforts. Like Vigan's heritage-led development, which reframed cultural assets as drivers of economic growth, the Awati TI-KAPE program positions Indigenous knowledge systems, heirloom coffee, Ramit weaving, and cultural identity as strategic resources rather than remnants of the past (Cruz, 2017; Nam & Thanh, 2024). Through active stakeholder participation and integration into market systems, the program demonstrates that cultural heritage can serve as a foundation for economic development, social empowerment, and long-term sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provided a clear picture of the *Hanunuo* Mangyan community by looking closely at what makes them strong and what continues to challenge their everyday lives. The findings show that the *Hanunuo* people draw great strength from their rich cultural traditions, their deep connection to the land, and the strong sense of unity that binds their community. Yet, they continue to face limitations in literacy, access to technology, environmental policies, and awareness of climate-related risks that affect their ability to adapt to a changing world.

Opportunities for growth are present: committed support from the local government, partner universities, and organizations; new economic possibilities through roll-on/roll-off terminals; and growing interest in heirloom and organic crops that the community can proudly produce. Still, their development is slowed by difficult roads, the presence of insurgency, a schooling system that often overlooks indigenous culture, and gaps in basic and social services.

By using the TOWS matrix, the study identified key areas where development can genuinely make a difference through tourism, industry, culture, agriculture, governance, and education. From these priorities came strategies that honor the community's heritage and aspirations by investing in cultural and natural

treasures, working together to safeguard traditions, promoting sustainable farming, and strengthening policies that are inclusive and respectful of indigenous identity. These insights form the heart of the proposed Awati TI-KAPE Community Development Program, which the University envisions as a culturally sensitive and gender-responsive initiative for long-term partnership with the community.

Ultimately, this study reminds us that real community development begins with listening. Participatory assessment ensures that plans and policies reflect indigenous values and lived experiences, not just external expectations. Research and extension work, when done with cultural respect and genuine collaboration, can become powerful tools for protecting heritage and improving the social and economic well-being of indigenous communities like the *Hanunuo* Mangyan.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to improve the grammar and sentence structure of the manuscript. Elicit was also employed to assist in the literature review process, specifically for identifying relevant research papers and synthesizing key themes. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Zusette Candelario-Aplaon: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing – original draft, and writing – review & editing.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions related to participant confidentiality and the sensitive nature of the data. However, the data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with the permission of the Mindoro State University Research Ethics and Review Committee (MinSURERC).

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