Struggles of Indigenous Peoples: The Case of a Mamanwa Diaspora in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

In Southeast Asia - as in most parts of the world, the indigenous peoples are the most vulnerable to poverty, illness, and injustice caused by multiple factors. Anchored on the Self-Determination Theory of Ryan and Deci (2009), this explanatory, single, holistic case study examined the struggles and causal factors affecting a Mamanwa diaspora in the West-Visayan region of the Philippines by conducting in-depth interviews with 22 participants who were selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015) generated 5 themes representing their struggles: 1) poverty, domestic violence, and strained relationships; 2) health and environmental risks; 3) inequity in education; 4) poor infrastructure; and 5) low income. From among the causal factors identified as determinants of their struggles, illiteracy proved to be the latent but strongest variable. This implies the need to make education accessible to them with corresponding financial, material, and moral support. On a wider scale, the findings suggest the need for the government to review economic, infrastructure, health, and education policies for indigenous peoples and legally recognize and protect their rights to territories, natural resources, traditional knowledge, and self-determination. Future researchers are encouraged to explore the struggles of other indigenous diasporas to solidify a collective call for action.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Mamanwa diaspora, Thematic analysis, Southeast Asia, and Philippines.

INTRODUCTION:

The world acknowledges the importance of protecting the indigenous peoples (IPs) not only because they are humans entitled to basic needs and services but because their contributions have significantly impacted humanity (The World Bank, n.d.). A plethora of the studies confirm that IPs guard the environment, combat climate change, increase preparedness for natural disasters, and provide valuable indigenous knowledge (Dapar & Alejandro, 2020; Gabriel *et al.,* 2020; Ogar *et al.,* 2020). In addition, many of their unique century-old cultures and the traditions provide artifacts that produce missing links in history (Justice, 2018; Ogar *et al.,* 2020; Ross, 2005). The IPs also hold traditional medical knowledge that helps doctors and scientists discover alternative ways of healing (Dapar & Alejandro, 2020) while their indigenous literary genres deepen our understanding of human phenomena (Justice, 2018). The global recognition of IPs brought about initiatives to uplift their lives by prioritizing programs for the culturally-sensitive palliative care (Guinaran & Alupias, 2021; Greenwood *et al.,* 2018);

access and equity in IP education (Ngales & Astete, 2020) women empowerment (Durán-Díaz *et al.,* 2020) preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural identity (Mikhailovna & Anatol'Evna, 2018), and programs that promote sustainable development among the indigenous youth through reorientation of teacher education (Hopkins & Kohl, 2021; Shulla *et al.,* 2020). However, it is undeniable that the IPs comprises only 6% of the world's entire population accounting for 19% of those within the extreme poverty level (The World Bank, n.d.). This gives them a poor chance of being heard and noticed when voicing their struggles and grievances. Despite the advances and efforts to improve the lives of IPs, there is ironically more suffering than progress in several indigenous villages. Recent studies reflect the struggles besetting IP communities most of which are linked to internal and external displacement (Burton, 2003; Hagen & Minter, 2020; Musgrave, 2020) human rights violations (The World Bank, 2013) unresolved land disputes (Rojas-Páez & O'Brien, 2020) lapses in program implementation and irregularities in policy formulation (Cuaton & Su, 2020). There is likewise a steady decline in the efforts to preserve and protect indigenous knowledge (Walter *et al.,* 2021) which may be caused in part by acculturation (De Leon, 2021).

There is a failure in promoting equity in health care (Greenwood *et al.,* 2018) and environmental degradation due to climate change (Craighead & Yacelga, 2021). The life expectancy of IPs continues to drop by 20% lower than that of non-indigenous peoples primarily due to chronic diseases that remain untreated because of inaccessible health services (Shahid *et al.,* 2018). Many indigenous women suffer a lack of access to healthcare facilities during childbirth due to discrimination, mistreatment, and a lack of respect for cultural practices (The World Bank, n.d.). Although there are intervention policies and programs for Ips, the government relies more on IP data analytics in making decisions leaving the Indigenous Peoples with little control over the gathering, usage, and application of data about them, their lands, and their cultures (Walter *et al.,* 2021). This unnecessary intrusion hinders them from attaining self-determination over their institutions, resources, knowledge, and information systems. Being excluded from consultation and assistance, their

expression is silenced resulting in cultural disintergration (Musgrave, 2020: Rojas-Páez *et al.,* 2020). The foregoing literature shows how important IPs are to the world, and how ironically, they continue to be overlooked as they experience a cycle of discrimination, poverty, and violence. The studies, although focused on a macro view of fragmented issues, suggest results that can be generalizable since they are commonly experienced by all IPs. However, no study explored the entirety of the aspects involved in a certain tribe's day-to-day interactions in a Southeast Asian context that enables a holistic perspective showing direct and indirect factors linked to their problems. The bulk of the literature deal with socio-political issues that subtly point to poverty being at the heart of these problems, which can likewise sprout from many other factors. If the government wishes to formulate contextualized, relevant, and responsive community-based programs for the indigenous peoples, it is imperative to examine their needs and problems from a perspective where the members of the tribe can participate in highlighting the major issues that affect them. From this context, the current study explored the struggles experienced by an indigenous diaspora and analyzed their root causes. The results of the study can provide valuable data needed in reviewing policies and programs that promote their economic stability, safety, and well-being.

Framework of the Study
This study uses a constructive paradigm (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) based on the premise that truth is relative and depends largely on a person's perspective. It respects the participants' subjective conception of meanings without disregard for the idea of objectivity (Crabtree, 1999) allowing the researcher to work closely with the participants who narrate their stories based on their constructed views (Lather, 1992). Anchored on Ryan's and Deci's, (2009) Self Determination Theory, the study banks on the proposition that indigenous peoples possess innate psychological demands and tendencies for growth based on human motivation and personality. The theory underscores the fact that indigenous peoples display self-determined or voluntary behavior when society and culture harmonize with their goals and aspirations. It emerges from the fundamental and universal principles and psychological needs for autonomy competency and rela-

tionship-building those are crucial to health and human development. To the indigenous peoples, self-determination is a right that enables them to meet their socio-cultural and economic needs and develop their personality, motivation, and well-being (Knop, 2002). Over the years and until today, the IPs have been fighting for their right to make decisions free from external pressures and dis-tractions, to be respected, and allowed to have an open dialogue to express their issues and concerns. In this study, the indigenous peoples voice their struggles and aspirations. They seek to be heard and viewed as distinct people who have the right to live just like anyone else and refuse to be viewed simply as a tiny fracture of the cultural minority.

METHODOLOGY:

This section details the research design, setting, participants, instruments, ethical considerations, the data collection, data analysis, reflexivity, and the validity procedures.

Research Design

This inquiry used an explanatory case study approach whose aim was to examine the participants' struggles and their corresponding causal links (Yin, 2003). Yin suggests that this type of case study provides a direct and simple method of gathering rich data which survey or experimental methods may be unable to fulfill. It uses a single holistic case study with embedded units, which means involving various age groups among the Mamanwa making the thematic analysis more practical, holistic, and inclusive (Yin, 2003; Atmowardoyo, 2018; Kabir *et al.*, 2023).

The Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in a small community occupied by a Mamanwa diaspora who left their ancestral home due to land expropriation and armed conflicts (Shuval, 2000). In 2014, after wandering from various territories, they settled in the lower region by the bank of the Cadacan River in Basey, Samar, a West-Visayan region of the Philippines in Southeast Asia. The diaspora has a total number of 101 members with 23 families that are female-dominated with 59% females and 41% males. Their chieftain is a female, not because they follow a matriarchal orientation, but because only she reached the secon-

dary level of education. Most of the members failed to acquire basic education. However, the tribe considers education as a crucial determinant in choosing a leader. They believe that educated leaders provide them with security and safety from external intrusion. The tribe is relatively young, with Generation Alpha aged 0-26 years comprising 53%, followed by Generation Z aged 27-42 years (22%). The Millenials aged 43-58 years (17%) and the least numbers comprise the Baby Boomers aged 69-77 years with 3% and the Post War or Silent Generation (aged 78-95) comprising 2%. The data further implies a wide gap between the younger and the older generation, posing a risk of acculturation, especially among the younger breed that are in the mainstream both in school and at work. The decreasing number of elders poses a threat to the decline of opportunities in documenting their cultural heritage. The tribe dwells within a non-Mamanwa community where support is expected to abound, yet they seem to be lacking in resources. This study is therefore just an initial step to help the tribe establish a stable ground in their new-found land.

Participants' Portrait

From the total population, 22 participants were chosen using purposive sampling (Campbell *et al.,* 2020). This method positioned the study in terms of its suitability for data collection, methods, goals, objectives, and analysis fulfilling all of the rigor requirements. The participants comprised the chieftain aged 37 years old; 5 elders aged 60-75 years old; 13 parents aged 18-45 years old; and 2 adolescents aged 16 up to 21 years old. Fifty-six percent of them (56%) were married; 9% were single; 14% were widowed; and 23% had live-in partners.

The informants were female-dominated with 82% females and only 12% males. The men gave minimal participation because they focused mainly on work and relied on women for social functions. For purposes of aiming to gather authentic data, the selection of the participants was based on the following inclusion/ exclusion criteria: 1) must be a true-blooded Mamanwa representing his/her family; 2) must possess sufficient knowledge about their tribe; 3) must be willing to participate in the study; and must be able to express one's self at least orally.

Data Collection

To achieve data credibility, the study used multiple methods of data sources such as a demographic survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews, observations, and archival analysis (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). The survey questionnaire elicited the participants' age, gender, civil status, and educational background while the semi-structured interviews comprised open-ended questions focusing on the struggles they were experiencing. Observations and archives centered on generating patterns of behavior and added supporting data, respectively. The current study is a strand from a university-wide research program for the Mamanwa tribe entitled, Documenting the Life and Culture of the Mamanwa that aims to capture the tribe's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The project required a special permit from the gatekeepers before data collection. Several consultations were held with individuals, groups, and organizations who control access to participants such as the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), the tribe chieftain, the elders, the Barangay Captain (district head), the town Mayor and the rest of the members of the tribe (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The negotiations took much time as we considered the safety of the young participants who took part in the study (Kay, 2019). The research process and materials were scrutinized by the Research Council equivalent to the university Ethics Review Board to ensure that the research follows protocols of participant consent and privacy, welfare, and the justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informed consent forms specified the aim, nature, benefits, risks, and procedures of the study and clarified the time needed for data collection. In reporting the data, participants were labeled using pseudonyms to protect their identities. For instance, P1, F, 30 means Participant 1, female, 30 years old. To bind the mutual agreement between the university and the tribe, both parties signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in a special gathering witnessed by the entire community, the stakeholders, and several university faculty and officials.

To strengthen the partnership, the Mamanwa also submitted a handwritten letter of intent to the university president confirming their willingness to participate in the study and subsequently receive support from the university. When all preparations were set, the research team administered the demographic survey followed by interviews and observations. The conduct of the study was later on monitored by staff from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples who monitored the proceedings of the project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis utilized a mixed method applying the statistical analysis such as frequencies and percentages for the demographic data (Sheard, 2018) while the interviews, archival documents, and observations were examined using thematic analysis (Clarke *et al.,* 2015). Guided by the main research question that centered on the participants' struggles as a diaspora along with their corresponding causes, the thematic analysis process followed 6 essential steps: 1- familiarization with data; 2-initial coding, 3-generating themes, 4-reviewing themes; 5-defining and naming the themes; and 6-reporting the themes. Immediately after the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and coded three times, first for identifying the initial codes or first impressions. Through the process of clustering, the initial codes were layered to generate the axial codes which were subsequently re-layered to extract the themes. Since the concept of struggles and causal factors are converging polarities dependent on each other, the data generated by the multiple sources were merged, analyzed, presented, and the discussed in a consolidated style.

Reflexivity

As a principal researcher, I acknowledge my role as the main instrument in the research process. I led the team in seeking permits and informed consent as well as in administering the data collection tools. In transcribing and coding the interviews I filtered out irrelevant data and, having my own experiences of struggles related to poverty, I bracketed prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs that had a potential influence on the data analysis process (Dodgson, 2019). I declare my assumptions that the indigenous Diasporas could be vulnerable to poverty, illness, and illiteracy considering the drastic limitations they face after leaving their roots. The sudden movement from their home to a strange land must have caused continued distress as realities of loneliness and isolation started to unfold in front of them. I also strongly believe that many indigenous peoples may possess

strong potentials, which, if tapped and developed can help rebuild their community.

Validity Procedures

To establish the trustworthiness of data, multiple sources were utilized to check whether the inferences drawn from one source had any convergence, inconsistency, or contradictions with the other sources and ensured that data were accurate and reliable (Creswell, 2007; Hayashi *et al.,* 1988). Aware that various minds produce various analyses and interpretations of data, the process was done cooperatively between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member-checking ensured the accuracy and consistency of interview transcripts as well as a shared interpretation and understanding of the core meanings and the themes (Erickson & Stull, 1998; Guest & MacQueen, 2008) which are presented and discussed in the proceeding chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

This chapter presents the 5 themes extracted from the data as follows: 1) Poverty, domestic violence, and strained family relationships; 2) Health and environmental risks; 3) Inequity in education: 4) Poor infrastructure; and 5) Low income. The discussion part is merged in this section to provide fluidity in explaining the implications and establishing connections with studies that either support or contradict the results of the study. There is an overlap of theme variables within the presentation and discussion because they inherently relate to each other. Research Questions: 1). What are the challenges experienced by the Mamanwa Tribe? 2). What causes those challenges?

Theme 1- Poverty, domestic violence, and strained family relationships

Primary data showed that participants are struggling with domestic violence and strained family relationships caused by poverty and illiteracy. Poverty, which is caused largely by the expropriation of their lands, is a key factor in food insecurity, levels of hunger, and malnutrition (Lopez, 2019). After leaving their homeland to get away from armed conflicts, the diaspora had very few resources not enough to sustain their daily needs (Shuval, 2000). In their current dwelling, one participant disclosed, "It would already be good if we can eat one meal in a day" (P3, F, 35), implying

that they are in an uphill struggle for minimal subsistence. Having to live with so little, the informants expressed that some of them resort to stealing upon reaching a point of extreme hunger and illness. In Maslow's hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2007) the tribe falls under the physiological level, which is one reason they pay little attention to education (P1, F, 37). In contrast to the popular saying that poverty is not a hindrance to education, the Mamanwa may feel that education can only be realized with financial freedom. One participant decries, "Not being educated enough has limited our work opportunities. We cannot live the life we want" (P1, F, 37). This statement suggests a strong conviction that education could be the only way they can get away from a secluded world where only a few possibilities exist. Having left their ancestral family farms, they now resort to low-income jobs demanding basic literacy and demonstrable skills, which, unfortunately, many of them do not possess. They recall being denied admission to free government training simply because they could neither read nor write. Their inability to find jobs subsequently results in violent tendencies, especially among males. The women reported that they and their children experienced physical assault from their husbands during heated arguments related to financial issues (P5, F, 34; P3, F, 35; P2, F, 39). Understandably, the men were under too much pressure trying to meet all ends (P9, M, 56) attributed to the stereotyped expectation that males are the breadwinners in the family. It can likewise be assumed that the women's irritability evolves from the stress of being unable to help out the family because they, too, could hardly find employment. Studies confirm that poverty can bring about higher chances of domestic violence and dysfunctional relationships among family members (Ajak, 2019; Cunneen & Tauri, 2019; Musgrave, 2020). Apart from domestic violence, the strained family relationships can likewise be attributed to two other reasons: first, their culture as a cohesive group collaborating to protect and promote their tribe at large, and the other, due to an ancient marriage custom. To discuss the first one, we observed that the Mamanwa tend to focus more on the welfare of the community, rather than attend to the issues of the nuclear family who rarely interact with each other on a more recreational and deeper level (Memo, 2018). Each family lives in a

small hut similar to a small studio with no walls separating the living room, bedroom, and kitchen; yet, their relationships are well-distanced. Cerio, (2019) confirms that IPs tend to prioritize work over family socializing, which, in the turn, limits their time for meaningful interactions. Furthermore, the wives, men, youth, and children tend to work together in separate groups pursuing their interests whether it is basket weaving, working on a construction site, playing, or making native products. However, when it comes to community issues, they naturally stand together, bound by a common goal of survival and protection from external threats. The other reason linked to strained family relationships comes from an ancient custom where marriage is not necessarily based on mutual agreement between the couple. For instance, a young Mamanwa male who dares to sneak into a Mamanwa girl's bedroom at night for whatever reason will be forced to marry her the following day (P2, F, 39). In the ancient Mamanwa tradition, whether the man stands as perpetrator or lover, the rule is that he must marry the girl; otherwise, he and his entire family will suffer or pay an extremely large amount to compensate for the damages done to the girl. Recalling her own experience, a middle-aged wife said, "Love was not present when I got married because I was forced to be with someone I did not even know. It was a forced marriage. The relationship with my husband just blossomed after a very long time because he is good. I do not even consider this to be love but merely a sense of attachment and responsibility" (P2, F, 39). This narrative suggests a silent protest of Mamanwa women against arranged marriage, especially one resulting from sexual assault or abuse which often breeds mental health issues (McGlynn *et al.,* 2021; Rahman, 2021).

Every culture has its idiosyncrasies and ways of the resolving conflicts which must be held and respected by everyone (San Jose, 2021). Nevertheless, the old marriage tradition potentially puts women at risk of becoming easy prey to unwanted one-sided marriages that may result in a lifetime of discord and chaos. For the men, getting married and having children may just be a way to strengthen their tribe with more members to protect them, but this goal comes at a cost because it not only violates women's chastity and rights to marry freely but it also compels both men and women to enter the multiple doors of family life unrehearsed.

Theme 2- Health and environmental risks

The Indigenous peoples are struggling against widening gaps in health caused by malnutrition. Participants reported, "We have several malnourished children due to our inability to provide proper nutrition" (P9, M, 56). Most of their meals consist only of root crops and a few vegetables that are grown in their backyards, resulting in vitamin and protein deficiencies. There are even times when they skip meals due to a lack of food. Studies show that meal skipping results in reduced nutrition and health status which in turn results in poor academic performance (Bae *et al.,* 2008). When asked why the children are often absent from school, a participant replied sadly, "How can our children concentrate in school when their stomach is empty?" (P1, F, 39). This statement suggests that the children are torn between complying with the demands of education and self-preservation. This could be one reason why many IP children drop out of school too early. Another issue related to health is the location of their residence which is just a few kilometers away from the waste landfill site of the town. They reported that some of their family members have recently met sudden unexplained illnesses and death assumed to be related to "inhaling harmful chemicals from the dumping site" (P8, F, 50). This finding implies that the tribe's current dwelling poses a serious threat to their health. Supporting this finding is a recent study showing that 78% of the participants who lived close to the landfill site experienced serious contamination of air quality evident from bad odors coming from chemicals (Njoku *et al.,* 2019). The authors reported that most participants experienced symptoms almost similar to those of the Mamanwa such as flu, eye irritation, and weakness of the body inducing much anxiety.

This confirms a recent finding that land disposition can have a tremendous effect on the health and well-being of indigenous peoples (Lewis *et al.,* 2021). Unless they move to a safer area, the indigenous peoples will constantly face the hazardous effect of the chemicals at the landfill site. What adds to their difficulty is the lack of medical support. They expressed, "We do not have immediate access to medical personnel, supplies, and medicine in times of illness (P1, F, 39). They have to travel several kilo-meters to get to the nearest com-

munity hospital which is often over-populated with little room for indigents like them. Research findings confirm that many diseases found in the marginalized sector remain untreated due to inaccessible health services (Shahid *et al.,* 2018). This suggests the need for the local government to establish a health services unit in the community to address medical problems. In contrast to earlier claims that indigenous peoples are one of the fundamental pillars of knowledge in public health (Lewis *et al.,* 2020) many of them lack knowledge in treating common illnesses like colds, coughs, and fever and applying first aid procedures in times of emergency (P10, M, 47). This could mean that the third-generation IPs is at risk of losing valuable medical knowledge their ancestors were highly known for. This may be attributed to the steady decline of the tribe elders who are involved in the transmission of traditional medical knowledge due to memory gaps and various illnesses. In addition, the medicinal herbs and materials for their ancient healing methods are now hardly accessible. Given that IP traditional knowledge carries enormous benefits, there is a need to properly document their healing practices.

Theme 3- Inequity in education

While the government attempts to provide equity in education, the Mamanwa tip off the scale as they experience poor access to quality education. The participants expressed that in general, they are not motivated to attend school. They lack educational supplies, facilities, and study skills in addition to poor nutrition. There is also a brooding conflict between the teachers and the Mamanwa community caused by a lack of shared understanding of each other's contexts, beliefs, and representations. While the teachers and school administrators feel that the Mamanwa are uncooperative, the tribe feels neglected by the school and the officials in the larger community where they currently live. In one of the dialogues where we gathered the tribe's stakeholders, the teachers reported that Mamanwa children seldom attend classes and do not participate in school activities. (P12, F, 54). The Mamanwa rebutted saying, "We do not have the resources needed to comply with projects and other school requirements. Our children cannot even eat breakfast and wear slippers to school" (P12, F, 54; P5, F, 34).

The statement implies that they want their children to acquire education, yet realizing their financial condition, they find this goal unrealistic. Overcoming the barriers requires material and financial support from outside because it is something they currently cannot provide. The government has to make education accessible to them in a more humane, healthy, and accepting environment (Ogar *et al.,* 2020) and the curriculum has to be indigenized to make learning more relevant to the tribe (Pratt *et al.,* 2019). Another problem is the Mamanwa children's intense feeling of insecurity toward other children outside their tribe. When asked why they feel that way, one participant replied, "We are ashamed of ourselves because we are different…we are just poor people looked down upon by others" (P17, F, 12). Those statements are strengthened by their native songs that depict low self-esteem and negative self-concept. An excerpt from the song runs as follows: "Tinamay ang among tribu, gitaw-an ug wala ilha." (Our tribe is despised; our existence is mocked and denied). This may have stemmed from previous collective experiences of rejection and abandonment in their ancestral homes. Incidentally, their sentiment is fueled by the mainstream media portrayal of the Mamanwa as vanished, victims or broken and damaged people in contrast to the portrait of native survivance that is a persistent feature of indigenous communities (Sabzalian, 2019). However Rosyad, (2020) believes that integrating multicultural education in the classroom can encourage indigenous peoples to value their and other people's unique cultures and enhance their potential.

Theme 4- Poor infrastructure

Another struggle that the Mamanwa tribe is facing relates to poor infrastructure in their community. In obtaining materials for their crafts, for instance, one participant recalled, "We walk on foot for long hours on rough roads leading to distant mountains where we gather raw materials. These roads are narrow, jagged, and not passable by vehicles; hence, we have to carry the goods on our backs while walking for several kilometers long" (P10, M, 47). The problem is that the price they get for the raw materials fails to compensate for the 2 weeks they spend in the mountains with little food and rest. Apart from transport fees to bring the goods to the city, they are bargained for and sold at a

very low price (P2, F, 39). Since a majority of them are illiterate, they find it hard to negotiate with the buyers for a fair deal. Hajizadeh *et al.* (2018) assert that income-related inequalities can create tremendous distress, affecting physical and psychological health. With the buy low, sell high strategy among middlemen buyers, the Mamanwa may have to continuously deal with stress and anxiety causing them to lose the motive to pursue their goals (Breitenbach *et al.,* 2021). In terms of facilities, they report a lack of electric posts near their community posing some risks for those going out or coming home at night. Since their community is located in the lower region of the barangay, the narrow, steep staircase partly made of clay and cement causes accidents especially for children and the elderly during nighttime (P5, F, 34). There is also no waiting shed nearby where specifically the sick and elderly can take shelter during extremely sunny or rainy days while waiting for a transport vehicle.

Lastly, the Mamanwa are using a dilapidated, narrow bridge in reaching the houses of 4 families located in an area within the community where stagnant water stays underneath for several days. The water rises high enough to cover the houses during fierce typhoons and flooding. They expressed that the bridge is old and ready to collapse anytime, "but we don't have the means to build a more stable one" (P1, F, 39). This is a major issue since this can affect the health and sanitation of the tribe. Stagnant water breeds mosquitoes causing dengue breakout and other related illnesses. These findings imply the need for inclusive budget allocations to enhance local community infrastructure. A regular dialogue between the tribe and the community officers can help reduce the risk of untoward incidents.

Theme 5- Low income
The data revealed that the Mamanwa are struggling against low income caused by illiteracy and a lack of product marketing opportunities. Most of the Mamanwa families do not possess basic literacy skills (i.e., reading, writing, and computing) resulting in disqualifications even for free Technical Educational Skills Development Authority (TESDA) training that requires them to read and write. Most of the men end up doing manual labor on construction sites while the women work as local domestic helpers and highland

farmers from which income fails to meet their basic needs. Hu *et al.* (2019) confirm the positive relationship between skills and wages.

The more skillful a worker is, the higher the pay is. Lacking demonstrable knowledge and skills in most areas of work, the Mamanwa falls behind skilled applicants. The Mamanwa also lack the initiative and negotiating skills needed in doing business. One of the concerns expressed by the participants is the fact that there are limited buyers of their native products because there is neither a dedicated area where they can display their items nor a sure market except for those who visit their tribe for the first time. (P12, F, 54). Despite having raw materials, they have no skills, equipment, or facilities required to produce other marketable items apart from native baskets, mats, and bracelets. Furthermore, they want to start their own business but do not have the required investment capital (P11, M, 48). This demonstrates their need for financial support, literacy, and livelihood training appropriate to their context. To the IPs, another function of literacy apart from employment relates to governance. One participant asserted, "We need literacy training so we can find a job and protect ourselves from external influence" (P1, F, 39).

This suggests their belief in education as a way to attain financial freedom and a level of independence where they can freely assert and defend their rights as a people. It confirms Ryan's and Deci's, (2009) Self Determination Theory which points to the indigenous people's inherent desire to bring out the best in them and prove their worth. However, illiteracy currently hinders them from reaching that goal. They think of it as a weakness that justifies government and non-government agencies' refusal to offer job opportunities (P5, F, 34). Similar to other issues, this, too, implies the need to remove the barriers in education to provide more opportunities for IPs in discovering and developing their innate talents and skills.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research
This research has its limitations which may have affected the results of the study. One of these is the lack of participation from the males due to work priorities and reliance on women for social functions. Although we used maximum variation in sampling, we

could not reach the target number of male participants needed to create balance in reporting. It is therefore recommended that a similar study be conducted with a proportionate number of male and female participants.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, this study was able to unearth the struggles and causal links affecting the indigenous peoples as represented by the 5 themes extracted from the primary data as follows: 1) poverty, domestic violence, and strained relationships; 2) health and environmental risks; 3) inequity in education; 4) poor infrastructure; and 5) low income. The factors causing their struggles were identified as land expropriations, malnutrition, living near a landfill site, poor access to quality education, illiteracy, and lack of product marketing skills. Further analysis shows that the theoretical hypothesis pointing to poverty at the core of their struggles can only be seen from a surface viewpoint. The latent variable that lies deep within their problems is the illiteracy. The essence of themes demonstrated the metaphorical image of a people cast into the vast sea with barely any survival kit. They live in a fast-changing landscape of globalization and knowledge explosion where quality education is crucial for survival. If Generation Alpha who dominates the Mamanwa diaspora is barely keeping pace with their contemporaries, we cannot expect the millennials and baby boomers to do any better. There has to be a drastic measure to bridge the gap between them and the present world they live in through a collaborative effort from the education sectors to ensure that indigenous peoples can access education with sufficeent financial, material, and moral support.

On a wider scale, the findings imply an urgent need to review the government's education, economic, health, and infra-structure policies for indigenous peoples and legally recognize and protect their rights to territories, natural resources, traditional knowledge, and self-determination. Moving forward, future researchers are encouraged to further explore the struggles of other indigenous Diasporas to solidify a collective call for action.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

I declare no conflict of interest that may have influenced the writing and publication of this manuscript.

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