

Development Gridlock and Ethnicity in the Philippines: The Benguet Experience

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Abstract: *Cerebral scrutiny on the pivotal events that hampered development among ethnic communities is worthy of investigation considering the growing clamor among indigenous communities as indispensable partners in national development. The experience of the Igorot tribes of Benguet in the Cordilleras of northern Philippines was historically entrenched with the irreversible effects of foreign intervention, which in a way contributed to the marginalization of its indigenous peoples. The impacts of the democratization process, however, led the post-war regimes to embark on national policies intended to strike the balance between national integration and cultural pluralism, geared towards mutual growth and development. Consequently, an assimilation crisis ensued as an ethnocentric view of development among the IPs clashed with the ideals of national development, with an outgrowth of ethnic nationalism strongly engrossed in the daily grind of their political struggle. This study therefore, looked into the intricacies built into these national policies as it interfered with the indigenous peoples' clamor for inclusive development. It proved, however, that complexities arising from crucial issues directly affecting them must be thoroughly re-examined. Thus, in aid of the ethno-phenomenological approach, an indigenous developmental model is seen as an exigent measure to help address the problem through an arduous yet compelling task of an in-depth investigation and analysis of the pressures of IP development. In the end, the IPs in the grassroots unanimously demand an urgent comprehensive review of IP-related developmental policies.*

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples, Development, National Policies, Assimilation Crisis

1. Introduction

Benguet province is part of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) situated in the northern Philippines. The other provinces include Ifugao, Mt. Province, Abra, Apayao, Kalinga, and Baguio City. The region is home to various ethnic minorities collectively known as the *Igorots*. Meanwhile, Benguet is the hearthstone of at least four ethnic tribes, the *Kankanaey*, *Ibaloi*, *Kalanguya*, and the recently recognized group, the *Ikarao*. Among all the aforesaid provinces, Benguet became the center of political integration, the fact that it formerly houses Baguio City, which is popularly known as a handmaid of American rule in the early 1900's. Not only did the province host an alleged American benevolence, but it also became a source of mineral ores, at the same time the site of major hydro-electric dams. Its strategic location, commercial potential, and its cool climate attracted the Americans to invest in the province and became an important trading center in the Cordilleras during the American colonial period. It is indeed the most acculturated among the Cordillera provinces in terms of economic and political activities under colonialists' rule. Thus, it shares a rich repository of socio-economic and political experiences worthy of studying, a preliminary step towards understanding the dynamics of development of the whole Cordillera region.

Significantly, the present predicament of the IPs in Benguet is traced from colonial policies, both of Spain and America as shown on historical records. The post-colonial regimes so far engaged in an active partnership with the IPs in the province, considering its economic potentials. As mentioned earlier, it became a major source of economic capital, such as mineral ores and hydro-electric dams. Unfortunately, these projects while intended to foster development caused historical injustices among the IPs, which consequently

awakened their right to self-determination in a period of rapid political changes. It is therefore a moral obligation of the people of Benguet to identify the barriers of development and embark on a mission of stronger pro-active participation different from a quite passive political involvement in the past.

As a national initiative, the Cordillera was doomed to undergo political assimilation into the larger polity in an unending search for the "good and just life." The richness of its own cultural heritage and its long history of independence is fully recognized, but does not warrant absolute independence from the central government. It belongs nowhere but to the Philippine state. In an attempt to give justice to the uniqueness of its cultural heritage within the framework of national development, various innovations were undertaken via the top-down approach of the central government, but optimism was undermined by unconvincing results.

2. Literature Survey

Canilao [1] asserted that there is an indispensable need for political theory in the Cordillera, observing that previous studies by distinguished anthropologists and political scientists about the region, already set the phase for a higher cognitive level of inquiry about the future of Cordillera politics. She further re-echoed Paul Ricoeur's [2] claim, "The problem is not simply to repeat the past, but rather to take root in it to ceaselessly invent." In the words of Habermas,[3] "it is not sufficient that the researcher interprets; he must be armed with the power to reflect and to criticize." Inspired by these insights, there is really a need to gradually deviate from purely descriptive studies. Hence, I intend to present a better understanding of the phenomena that defines the present contours of Cordillera politics and to

possibly explore better alternatives for the “good and just life” based on the present political reality.

Meanwhile, this study finds its roots on the foundation of nation-building which heightened in the aftermath of the Second World War. The period of reconstruction was coupled with the effort to advance unity through the assimilation process. The main advocates of the movement were the leading American academic community leaders such as Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly and Reinhard Bendix, who eventually advanced the theory of nation-building through national integration aimed at the creation of modern states [4]. Its main objective was to foster homogeneity within a pluralistic community setting. Nation-building was the current norm at that time; such was coupled with the increasing role of education and political participation in national development. Consequently, the local communities were acculturated to the larger society, creating an opportunity of state- rule through a network of various mechanisms for public service. The cultural fusion, therefore, exposed the former parochial peoples with center state periphery [4].

In almost the same period, ethnic studies proliferated as noted in Diaz’s [5] timeline. He mentioned the Civil Rights Movement headed by African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm, and others, who were instrumental in forcing the American government to deal with issues of segregation and racial discrimination. More organizations followed which culminated into the longest strike in American soil in 1968, [5] by a coalition of student groups under the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). On an interesting note, [6] it was that reiterated the prediction of Marxism and Modernism on the belief that the rapid industrialization and modernization of the society will lead to the eventual decay of ethnicity. It did not happen as we witnessed the growing complexities of ethnic dynamics across the globe.

This trend, however, results in eventual assimilation to partition, and some extent secession. As stated by Hunt et al. [7], the occupation of two or more ethnic groups within a single nation inevitably creates varying relationships, which may result in acculturation and to a somewhat advance relationship called *integration*. However, the occurrence of annihilation may sometimes end up to partition or even genocide. In a sense, cultural pluralism if effectively manage could be an advantage but as argued [8], pluralism is vulnerable to perpetuation due to the refusal among minority groups to be assimilated, placing a higher value to their own cultural identity and practice. They observe that most minority groups prefer the principle of equalitarian pluralism as espoused by Marger [9]. Here, there is the maintenance of cultural identity and group boundaries are observed, while ethnic groups participate politically and economically. These ethnic narratives contribute to the continuous desire of other culturally- diverse countries across Asia to aspire for development.

In the Philippines, the government embarked on the passage of laws and policies designed to foster national development and sound governance among its peoples generally classified as majority and minority Filipinos. Interestingly enough, the

relics of the colonialists, specifically the Americans who set the foundation of the country’s political system, dictated the phase of legislative actions. Consequently, several policies promulgated by them seemed to hurt the cultural minority groups in several ways. Their ignorance of the law, for instance, deprived them of land possession which eventually resulted in displacement in their respective ancestral lands and domain. Unfortunately, the post-colonial crusade towards indigenous recognition failed to address poverty and social marginalization. Although, it paved the way towards a stronger commitment to address the aforesaid problems through the process of constitutional accommodation, by mandating the Cordilleras and Mindanao to attain an autonomous status.

Such was perceived as the viable solution to free the indigenous peoples from the bondage of poverty, neglect, and social marginalization. In a pluralistic society like the Philippines, the *Cordillerans* just like their Moro brothers in the south, deserve to be accommodated in the mainstream political arena where they can freely articulate their rights and aspirations as indigenous peoples. Within a framework of national development, the state must also be committed to foster mutual partnership observing the highest degree of respect for indigenous customs and traditions. Hence, policies and thrusts promulgated by the government in the governance of these tribal groups must be carefully crafted in the spirit of mutual respect and communal harmony.

However, Casambre [10] said that such a breakthrough was marred by political pressures arising from opposing approaches to development between the state’s top-down scheme and the tribal groups’ inward-looking and village-centered approach. Besides, political inter-ethnic differences are evident between and among the different tribal groups themselves. Meanwhile, the Cordillera People’s Alliance (CPA) successfully lobbied for the possible grant of autonomy of the region [10]. Unfortunately, such a landmark opportunity for national recognition and development was derailed by the State’s homogenous outlook of a unified Cordillera people. Consequently, it created a vacuum that continues to hamper developmental opportunities in the region.

It turned out as a failed attempt as manifested by the consecutive rejection of autonomy. In a hold-over situation, EO 220 paved way for an interim Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) that served as an operative regional administrative body up to the present. Meanwhile, the post-independence governments introduced policies for regional development aimed at the formation of a national political community, under the guise of the national integration project.

This political innovation was geared to strengthen the partnership between the indigenous peoples and the national government in a mutual desire for progress. But in a sense, this was the major source of conflict that consequently placed the rest of the Cordillera provinces, including Benguet, into a state of political and economic instability. Nonetheless, vibrant political participation and a high sense of political consciousness, most especially among the poor

and the unfortunate are expected to enlighten the rather passive politics in the Cordilleras. On a pragmatic sense, however, almost three decades is past due since the introduction of the 1987 Constitution, but such a considerable period simply left a pinch mark of development.

As I pointed earlier, this study aimed to investigate the snail-paced development in Benguet province (as a preliminary step in understanding the development trail in the Cordilleras) and the crafting of an indigenous development model that may be instrumental to policy-makers. It is also intended to closely examine the political disjuncture caused by the national integration process between the national government and the Benguet ethnic groups as it is deemed crucial in the political and economic development in the province. It also exposed the effects of the major exogenous factors (e.g. historical injustices etc.) to local development. A close examination of IP governance, as well as the impacts of the assimilation process, will be extensively investigated. Finally, this was made possible through personal visits, interviews, and acquaintances with the key informants.

Problem Definition

Underdevelopment delimits the IP opportunities to enjoy a better standard of living in spite of an attempt by the national government to promote the welfare of its indigenous peoples through landmark legislations. On top of these innovations was the inclusion of an autonomous provision in the 1987 Constitution which was perceived as precursor to development among the IPs. This was later reinforced with the passage of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) few years thereafter. Unfortunately, after almost more than three decades of its passage, the major objectives were not realized. Thus, the investigation of the causes of the snail-paced development, as well as a close examination of the political disjuncture arising from the national integration process between the State and the ethnic groups as it is deemed crucial in the political and economic development in the region. It also exposed the effects of the major exogenous factors (e.g. historical injustices etc.) to local development.

3. Methodology

This portion of the study utilized the qualitative approach through purposive interviews among key informants. Significantly, an ethno-phenomenological approach was used to analyze and interpret the crucial issues besetting the province, as a vital mode of crafting an indigenous development model, which could serve as a guide in addressing the problem of underdevelopment. In doing so, various guide questions for the interview were designed to solicit data from the different key informants such as the IP Council of Elders leaders, former public officials, as well as Indigenous Peoples Organization (IPO) leaders. Likewise, a different set of interview questions was used for the selected National Commission of Indigenous Peoples, (NCIP-Benguet Office) field officials, being an indispensable agent in implementing the law. For an in-depth investigation, semi-structured interviews were employed in obtaining substantial

information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions from respondents. Somehow, it provided a wider room for more detailed questions which resulted in a higher response rate. Interviews were conducted from April to September 2019.

Bounded by the protocol on indigenous studies, a copy of the manuscript was submitted to the Office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples- Cordillera Administrative Region (NCIP-CAR), for an initial review. It was later certified as outside the ambits of NCIP Administrative Order 01 Series of 2012 also known as "The Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices (IKSPS) and Customary Laws (CLs) Research and Documentation Guidelines of 2012." Consequently, the Regional Director NCIP-CAR endorsed the study to the NCIP-Benguet for necessary assistance.

Letters of permission were addressed to the key informants for the conduct of interviews during their most convenient time. A strategic list of schedules among key informants was prepared to ensure their attendance. Moreover, interviews were conducted in the language understood by the key informants. The snow-balling strategy was also employed as the need arises

4. Results and Discussions

The political struggle of the indigenous peoples in Benguet is presented in a thematic approach. Discussions and analysis of the issues are presented to identify the flaws and political inefficiencies that shall serve as a guide in the crafting of viable model for indigenous development.

4.1. Dynamics of *Ethnic Politics* in Benguet

An enduring account was deduced from the various yet related descriptions by respondents about ethnic politics in Benguet province. Several respondents agreed that the relics of patriarchal influence with the elders looked upon as sources of wisdom regarding crucial decision-making. Nonetheless, some respondents have a strong regard to tribal affiliation and attachment and a village-level and an inward-looking outlook of local politics which adheres to a participatory and consultative brand of leadership. Furthermore, a significant observation by a former local official reveals the existence of the "*politics of humility*," where ordinary people can freely approach their leaders. The entry of women in local ethnic politics is also a new trend in the patriarchal political arena.

Compared to their lowland brethren, Benguet politics is the most peaceful, as reflected in the absence of politics-related incidents recorded in history. The value of "*inayan*," (the drive to be morally upright over doing evil things) persists in their culture. The respondents claim that the non-aggressive attitude among the Benguet people is rooted in the long-cherished tradition of instilling discipline, by the elders who are presumed men of honor and integrity. Although political campaigns are somewhat characterized by mudslinging, these naturally cease after elections where opposing candidates freely meet and interact during victory parties.

Accordingly, the absence of political tensions and the prevalence of communal security is always associated with the unity of the Benguet tribes.

Unfortunately, the stability of peaceful politics in the province is gradually deteriorating due to various factors as recently observed. A sort of cultural disintegration as attested by the respondents ensues, as local politics is gradually tainted with corruption, dishonesty, vote-buying, and the impacts of an emerging cash economy. A respondent confirmed that Benguet voters already seek donations from politicians, thus promoting “money-politics,” to the detriment of the poor but deserving public servant. These per se are proofs to the deterioration of values among the IPs themselves.

Furthermore, assessing the level of political consciousness and their participation in public issues is also crucial in battling ethnic politics decelerators. Respondents were able to identify some of these factors: First, the lack of vibrant leaders who failed to empower their constituents. Second, the existence of passive community members, who by practice believe that leaders are sole political actors, thus resulting in passive constituents, and lastly, most members are pre-occupied by work/job, which is attributed to the emergence of the cash economy. Although, all respondents are optimistic to the point that these constituents are willing to participate, given all opportunities, recognition, and motivation by the government.

4.2. On Historical Injustices

The Cordilleras is not only a place of rich cultural heritage but a source of major economic potentials like rivers and mineral ores. It is the water cradle of Northern Luzon and of three major hydro-electric dams which include Ambuclao, Binga and San Roque are located in Benguet. These projects were geared towards improving the generation of power at the same intended to mitigate flooding in the adjacent lowland provinces. Moreover, the province is a site to big commercial mining companies, with the towering three mining giants, the Benguet Corporation, Philex Mining, and the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company, among others. The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), obviously is vital to national development, but allegedly neglected for a long time. Most of the respondents of the study confirmed it based on factual and experiential information.

4.2.1. Dam Construction: Background, Issues and Concerns

Local records show that the Ambuclao Dam was conceptualized and completed from 1948 to 1957 when it was inaugurated, almost passing through three administrations (Roxas-Quirino-Magsaysay) respectively. These projects were made possible through the inherent right of the State in its legitimate exercise of the power of Eminent Domain. Ambuclao Dam is a hydroelectric facility in Bokod, Benguet in the Philippines. This one of the oldest and largest hydroelectric power plants in the country, along the Agno River. Meanwhile, the Binga Dam is located in the nearby municipality of Itogon, which was constructed almost simultaneously with the Ambuclao Dam in 1956.

However, the catastrophic earthquake in July 1990 that hit Luzon, resulted in siltation that eventually halted the operation of the Ambuclao Dam, and eventually its decommissioning in 1999. This opted for the national government to enter into a contract of conditional sale of these properties with the private sector. The Ambuclao Dam underwent massive rehabilitation and upgrading until its inauguration in 2011, while the Binga Dam completed its uprating work in 2014.

On the other hand, the San Roque Dam was recently constructed within the vicinity of Benguet and Pangasinan. Accordingly, this is the largest and most expensive dam in the country, having a massive reservoir to generate power and irrigate farmlands. This project was under the build-Operate-Transfer project of the government. At the onset of the project, several families were displaced. This in effect reincarnated the haunting experience of the Binga and Ambuclao projects. In a way, it awakened a sort of ethnocentric drive to prevent history from repeating itself. At least the government, through the National Power Corporation (NPC), embarked on an effort to avoid injustices from happening in aid of various social welfare measures.

A local ecologist [11], emphasizes on Dr. Robert Goodland’s critic about the ill-effects of dams on people’s lives. The latter who was a former senior ecologist and an authority in the World Bank.

Goodland asserts [12]:

People were often relocated or resettled without regard to their individual community or societal needs. Concern was often lacking for their future welfare: how or whether they would find employment receive education and health care, retain their cultural and social identity and ensure their safety and social continuity. It was not uncommon for the displaced peoples to be placed in habitational settings foreign to their cultures or to be located in proximity to other peoples with whom they had no affinity or even longstanding enmity. [12 p.14]

He further said that the displaced *Ibalois* claimed deception and manipulation, noting almost several thousands of people forcibly ejected from their landholdings [11]. By conscription, they were helpless but to take refuge in resettlement areas like Nueva Vizcaya and Palawan, far from their long-cherished domicile.

In his personal experience in the early ‘80s, he [11] recalled accompanying some 65 families, who were evicted from Ambuclao in a designated resettlement area in Conwap Valley of Nueva Vizcaya. He further narrated that Conwap was almost a barren place. Rather it was inhabited by other groups of indigenous peoples who were quite hostile to the newcomers. It was not unlike the typical Benguet climate. They were so disoriented on how to start life in a foreign place. In a very deplorable condition, they were helpless but to succumb to their faith.

The aforesaid experience is a blatant violation of the right to resettlement and just compensation. The Philippine

Constitution [13] provides that, Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation (Art. III Sec. 9). Moreover, the issue transcends the legitimacy of the law, since these properties comprised of hundreds of hectares of precious farmlands and residential dwellings are non-compensable as claimed by one of the respondents because of its sentimental worth. The pain of non-compliance and inaction by the government was unanimously affirmed by almost all of the respondents.

In a recollection of a 79-year-old respondent, he recalled lobbying for several years only to get a meager amount from the government out of several tax declarations in his possession, although saying that his family was still lucky as compared to those without documents who simply relied on oral traditions in land succession. Others simply recalled watching their rice puddings submerged underwater, a source of family sustenance over the generations. Worse, the classification of their land by the government as watershed and forest reserve rendered resettlement no longer an option. It is also lamentable to note that several respondents claimed that their forefathers were deceived by empty promises such as employment, rehabilitation, compensation among others. To date, many affected families have never been fairly compensated. Unfortunately, this inaction of government leaders in total disregard of land conception among the Cordillera peoples waged a silent protest that kept them away from the confine cooperation with the state.

Casambre [14] notably reiterated an Igorot conception of the sacredness of land as articulated by a Kalinga warrior and leader, Macli-ing Dulag:

You ask us if we own the land. And mock us. "Where is your title?" When we query the meaning of your words you answer with taunting arrogance. "Where are the documents to prove that you own the land?" Title. Documents. Proof (of ownership). Such arrogance to speak of owning the land when you shall be owned by it? How can you own that which will outlive you? Only the race owns the land because only the race lives forever. [T]o claim a place is the birthright of every man. The lowly animals claim their place, how much more with man. Man is born to live. Apu Kabunian, the lord of us all, gave us life and placed us in this world to live human lives. And where shall we obtain life? From the land. To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right. In tilling the land, you possess it. And so, land is a grace that must be nurtured. Land is sacred. Land is beloved. From its womb springs our Kalinga life. [14 p. 109]

The failure of the state to seriously understand this concept contributes to the growing hostile attitude towards mutual growth as envisioned. Such historical mishap shall not be forgotten most especially that the operation of these dams was recently passed to new developers, the SN Aboitiz in partnership with a foreign company.

A key informant, a former Barangay official and representative of the *Council of Elders* in Binga, Itogon and recently a high-ranking employee of SN ABOITIZ, disclosed the failure of the government through the National Power Corporation, (NPC) to consider the plight of the indigenous peoples, specifically those directly affected by the dam construction. He further said that the indigenous community did not benefit at all with the project, most especially that it

was exempt from national taxes. According to him, the privatization of the Dam, together with the advent of the IPRA law, allowed the municipality to enjoy benefits out of local taxes. The community also started enjoying the benefits derived from the company's Corporate Social Responsibilities, (CSR) among others. This statement was further complemented by a former member of the municipal council, and the present president of the *Itogon Indigenous Peoples Organization* (IIPO) and key founder of the leading IPO in the province, the *Tinongdan Indigenous Peoples Organization Inc.* (TINPO). It must be noted, however, that bulk of taxes on these dams go directly to Makati.

In the same vein, another IPO leader from the *Karao* community of Bokod, Benguet attested that the NPC left a trace of a shattered community for its failure to respond to the clamor of the indigenous peoples to do something out of the historical injustices committed in the past. Now that the operation of the dams was transferred to a private entity, they feel that their call for justice will be placed in oblivion.

Recently, mini-hydro dam projects were constructed in the province which allegedly undergoes the rigid process of Free Prior and Inform Consent, (FPIC) as required under the IPRA. This is a revenue-raising scheme that will allegedly inure to the benefit of the Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICC's). However, the majority of the respondents warned about the negative effect of the Renewable Energy Law, a recent legislation, about the lowering in the share of local taxes on the concerned LGUs. Just recently, critics claim that "the Cordillera rivers are under attack, with at least 87 hydropower projects awarded by the Department of Energy throughout the region" (Cordillera People's Alliance)." Accordingly, *Igorots* shall be united to protect their land and water resources from plunder and further destruction.

4.2.2. Benguet Commercial Mines: Background, Issues, and Concerns

By coincidence, Benguet is not only a site of three major dams but also of three major commercial mining firms. We have the Benguet Corporation, the Philex Mining Co. Inc., and the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company Inc. These mining firms in Benguet traced its operational history from the onset of American rule in the early 1900s. The vast deposits of precious ores encouraged some American soldiers to stay in the Philippines even after the war. American fortune seekers arrived in the new colony and started the mining exploration.

"Our History: Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company" [15], describes traditional mining in the country at the conventional river panning method. It was only in 1906 when the first mining operation in aid of the modern system was introduced. In the 1960s, the mining operations improved a lot to the extent of expanding explorations not only to gold but chromite and copper among others.

It [15] further added that Lepanto in Mankayan then was the major source of copper since the 12th century when the Chinese traders arrived in the barter of their wares with copper. The copper industry flourished in the years to follow since it became the only source of metal during that time. Accordingly [15], a mining operation in the place started as

early as 1864. In 1936, American prospectors incorporated the Lepanto Consolidated Mining Company, with its first copper concentrator installed.

But the rise of Ferdinand Marcos to power and the declaration of martial law, had changed the mining landscape, specifically on the ownership scheme. He abolished the parity rights and gave the majority control to Filipinos, with only 40% of foreign control. However, his family and cronies benefited much from the said industry. One thing for sure, just like the dams, these mining explorations inevitably added to the historical injustices committed not only to the people but to the environment as well. Consequently, the IPs gradually felt the need to protect their land from indiscriminate encroachment and exploitation.

“Cordillera Peoples Alliance” [16] introduced the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), as “an independent federation of progressive people’s organizations, most of them grassroots-based organizations among indigenous communities in the Cordillera Region, Philippines.” Undeniably it helped in the pursuance of the Igorot’s right to self-determination. Founded during the height of the Marcos’ dictatorship, it was responsible for the successful opposition of the destructive projects, such as the Chico Dam construction and the commercial logging concession of the Celophil Resources Corporation. It is also behind the landmark constitutional inclusion of the *autonomous provision* in the 1987 constitution. From its archival repository, I culled most of the controversial issues and concerns.

Incidence of repeated leakages of toxic waste from the Philex Mining Corporation and Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corporation tailings dams proved that there is no such thing as *responsible large-scale mining*. The people downstream, in this case, the residents alongside the Agno river are on the losing end [16].

As observed, the common experience of the people of Itogon and Mankayan with the Benguet Corporation, and Lepanto mines respectively, are attestations to the ruinous consequences of commercial mining to both people and environment. It was confirmed that communities are destroyed, and nearby rivers contaminated with toxic wastes. More than that is the worsening effects of deforestation and pollution.

For instance, in 2009, many families were displaced in Mankayan, Benguet, when a public school sank and was rendered operational. It was also alleged that the continuous mineral extraction by Lepanto mines caused the mishap and that residents in the affected areas vehemently called for the total halt to mining activities.

Nonetheless, a re-examination of the very small percentage of royalties given to the LGUs concern is not enough to compensate for the irreversible effects of environmental destruction. Thus, in an article, “Philippines: No such thing” (2012), the CPA leadership urged the government to re-visit all mining laws in the country, specifically the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 and EO 79.

In a recent report, the government through the Mining and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) allowed EO 79 and its Implementing Rules and Guidelines (IRR) an opportunity to be scrutinized by a special body from the UN, which in turn pledged to protect the environment, to look into the welfare of the indigenous peoples, equity in the mining revenue, among others. Incidentally, the IRR was suspended due to the questions raised by the powerful mining industry players.

But despite this development, many local government units across the country continued to ban the large-scale mining in their respective localities. According to the CPA chair, this constant opposition only proves the inability of corporate mining firms to convince the people of the advantages of large-scale mining. An interesting book entitled ‘Globalizing Philippine Mining’ features the perennial problems and points to the growing liberalization in mining operations that only enhance mining competitions among environmental plunderers, in exchange for gains from these mining operations but to the detriment of the environment.

It is too unfortunate that the Mining Executive Order of former Pres. Aquino, (EO 790) failed to address the loopholes of the Mining Act Law. The overwhelming influence of the mining industry prevails over national interests. Big mining firms can easily shy away from governmental regulations and continue to enjoy their sovereign autonomy as the most influential among the non-state actors [16].

4.3. Ancestral Lands and Ancestral Domains

Prill-Brett [17] presents the pivotal events relevant to the development of the Ancestral Land and Ancestral Domain in the Cordilleras. It all started with the Regalian Doctrine under Spanish colonial rule, which was later adopted by the American colonial government. This was later inherited by post-colonial regimes which gradually introduced laws and policies geared towards national development, with the indigenous people’s rights, a substantial consideration. To shed light on the complexities and issues about ancestral lands and ancestral domain, an accounting of the pivotal events that brought it before the forefront of public discourse in the Cordilleras, specifically in the province of Benguet, is a matter of IPs’ interest.

R.A. 8371, otherwise known as the Indigenous Rights Act, defines the following concepts: Ancestral domain refers to all areas generally belonging to ICCs/IPs comprising lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and natural resources therein, held under a claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs themselves or claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs and IPs themselves or through their ancestors, communally or individually since time immemorial, continuously to the present except when interrupted by war, force majeure or displacement by force, deceit, stealth, etc. (IPRA, section 3a) [17].

Meanwhile, Ancestral Lands are lands occupied, possessed and utilized by individuals, families, and clans who are members of the ICCs/IPs since time immemorial, by themselves or through their predecessors-in-interest, under

claims of individual or traditional group, ownership, continuously, to the present except when interrupted by *force majeure*, deceit, etc. (IPRA, section 3b)

In relation thereto, we can say that the Benguet tribes just like the other tribes in the Cordilleras value their lands over other possessions. It is the base of their human totality where they live a sacred life, nurtures their spirituality, defines their ethnic identity, and home to the richness of their cultural traditions. [17]

However, the respondents claim that only a few understand the significance of these matters. For instance, small-scale miners in the area is unaware that the site of their tunnels are part of the overlapping claim by both the state and mining companies. Some also complain about the complex system brought about by the rather conflicting scheme under the IPRA Law, and concerned government instrumentalities as to the management of natural resources. According to them, these government agencies shall closely coordinate with each other. Some called for the immediate review of the IPRA Law.

4.3.1. Traditional Land Tenure: Early *Ibaloy*s

Prill-Brett [18] articulated much on the concept of Traditional Land Tenure among the early *Ibaloy*s of Benguet. She stressed the “open access” practice that governs property management specifically lands and other resources. The value of communal ownership was observed and every member of the community enjoys the right over it. Although, communal ownership is not absolute since the introduction of permanent improvements such as the construction of rice paddings, or an investment on a tunnel for gold extraction by some individuals, are traditional measures towards personal ownership. She [18] also wrote that *Ibaloy* customary laws provide that the person who first person to occupy and introduced prior improvement owns the land (*primi occupantis* principle). Interestingly, the transfer of said property was done on a periodic public feast, in a ritual where the “priest” (*mambunong*) officiates the legitimate transfer of said property to the rightful owner.

4.3.2. Colonial Land Tenure and IPs' Disenfranchisement

However, the lure of imperialism distorted the indigenous land tenure practices not only in the Cordilleras but on the entire country as well. Although the Regalian Doctrine under the Spanish rule that claimed all lands and resources to the Spanish crown, did not in a way exert pressures on the *Ibaloy* traditional land tenure, because of the fierce resistance among them to preserve their territory from Spanish incursion unlike their lowland counterparts. Consequently, the Benguet tribe enjoyed undisturbed ownership of their lands within the period of Spanish rule.

However, the advent of American rule introduced major changes as to land ownership. They successfully penetrated the Igorot minds to succumb to their external benevolence, but at the same time commences a new struggle among the *Igorots* in general. The introduction of western laws specifically on natural resources inevitably placed the educationally disabled *Ibaloy*s on the losing end. Natural

resources were simply transferred from the Spanish Crown to the State. Several laws were passed such as the Commonwealth Act 141, or the so-called Public Land Act, which covered the classification, administration, disposition, and control of the “lands of the public domain.” It was followed by Commonwealth Act 496, otherwise known as the Land Registration Act of 1902. This time all landowners need to register their landholdings to the government.

The story of *Kafagway* (at present Baguio City) is worth sharing at this point, wherein the conception of building a city in the hinterland land proved to be inimical to the interests of the *Ibaloy* landowners. (Prill-Brett, 2015) included in her work Worcester's (Secretary of the Interior) report regarding the latter's effort to encourage the *Ibaloy*s to register their properties [18]:

We have protected them in their property rights and encouraged them to increase their agricultural holdings as they were too ignorant to understand and exercise their right to obtain free patent to small to small tracts of land which they long occupied and cultivated. I sent a special survey party to help them make out their application in due form. [Worcester 1983. p.282]

Moreover, she was able to access Dr. Carinos' account as to the American occupation in Baguio [18]:

The natives who ran away or left the center of the town during the last revolution against the Spaniards, of course lost their land claims because they really went to live far in the outskirts of the town... There were a few of the natives who did not abandon good the center of Kafagway. They were the Carinos and Carantese and others who could not be remembered. Those few secured titles to their lands. Many of the Igorots did not secure titles to their lands because of pure ignorance. Because they did not register their lands under the new regime, they lost titles to their lands. [18.p. 282].

These historical accounts are concrete reflections on how indigenous peoples all over the archipelago lost their lands through a historical mishap. On its face, it seems that the Regalian Doctrine sealed everything to an end. Its irreversible impact practically disenfranchised the IPs of their right to regain their rightful properties. The core issue here is the irreconcilable concept of land ownership between the IPs and the State. In retrospect, Macli-ing Dulag's resounding pronouncement of indigenous land ownership no matter how sensible it is, does not hold water within the legislative comfort of the State.

4.4. The 1987 Constitution and IPs

On the bright side, however, the Philippine Constitution institutionalized IPs recognition in some of its provisions, to wit [13]:

The State, subject to the provisions of this Constitution and national development policies and programs, shall protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to their ancestral lands to ensure their economic, social, and cultural

well-being. The Congress may provide for the applicability of customary laws governing property rights or relations in determining the ownership and extent of ancestral domain. (Article 12, Section 5);[13] p. 267 and the State shall recognize, respect, and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions. It shall consider these rights in the formulation of national plans and policies. (Article 14, section 17) [18 p.326]

These Constitutional mandates per se did not address the issue. These laws as observed by [10] are dubious because of the conditions prescribed in the provisions. She further pointed out the State's claim to national patrimony, which in a way considers territory as an essential element of the State. She asserted that the scheme so far hurts the IPs considering that the pursuit for national development and security entails extractive activities inimical to their interests since most of the resources are found within their respective communities. It must be noted that these projects include logging, mining, energy generation, among others. Unfortunately, she further raised the issue of the lack of sustainable resource management in the region under the centralist watch of the State.

4.5. A Paradigm Shift in Resource Management

It was asserted [18] that addressing this perennial problem entails the urgency of making the communities as viable partners in promoting sustainable development, but only after the IPs' ancestral lands and ancestral domains are recognized by the state. She clearly explains that a preliminary step towards this end was the issuance of Department Executive Order (DAO) No. 2, series of 1993, by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), with the major objective of awarding Certificates of Ancestral Lands (CALC) and Certificates of Ancestral Domains (CADC). For the latter, an Ancestral Domain Management Plan (ADMP) is required of the community [18].

However, [17] observes that the government's recognition of indigenous rights over ancestral lands and domains, most especially the occupation of forests as part of their ancestral domains claim, led to the "open-access" perception of the IPs. This was the unintended consequence of the governments' failure to effectively protect and manage the natural resources on the IPs' territory. This was indeed a complete turnabout from the State's previous belief that the IPs were forest degraders. This total reversal of state policies was further reinforced with the passage IPRA Law (RA 8371), a few years thereafter. These measures accordingly have been a "breakthrough in an attempt to correct the historical injustice" committed by the state for non-recognition of the IPs right to ancestral land and ancestral domain.

4.6. IPRA Law and Sustainable Development

The introduction of IPRA in the Philippines was an offshoot

of the advocacy in attaining sustainable development, specifically on the management of the earths' depleting resources. The national government so far failed to realize such advocacy, while there was massive depletion of these resources. Moreover, the subsequent recognition of ancestral lands and domains is anchored on the policy of "ecological conservation and the protection of biodiversity." Furthermore, it brought substance to customary laws in the governance property rights, as well the in the determination of the ancestral domain's boundaries.

At this point, the IPRA [21] mandated the creation of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), which "shall be the primary government agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of the policies, plans and programs to recognize, protect and promote rights of indigenous peoples" (IPRA Sec.3). This time, [18] explains that the NCIP is bound to issue a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) and Certificate of Ancestral Land Titles (CALTs) "over areas certified and delineated as such." The mandate is to issue "titles" and not merely "certificates" as previously practiced under DAO No. 2. Furthermore, the law allows the titling of ancestral lands in the name of individual owners through the Land Registration Act. In a significant pronouncement, the law provides that "individually owned ancestral lands which are used for agricultural, residential, pasture, and tree farming purposes, including those with a slope of (18%) percent or more, are hereby classified as alienable and disposable agricultural lands" (IPRA Sec. 12).

4.7. Public Land as Open Access and Prill-Brett's Legal Pluralism

The inevitable rise in the number of indigenous peoples engaged in the conversion of *communal* or otherwise known as common property regimes to *privatized* individual ownership, became a trend among the indigenous cultural communities in recent years. The utilization of *Tax Declaration* Instruments facilitated the rapid conversion of these lands to residential purposes to the detriment of the "original common property users."

Interestingly, what is *Legal Pluralism* in the construction of Prill-Brett? Accordingly,[20] "it is a situation where there are two sets of law that are selectively invoked by individuals." In a rigid analysis of the concepts of ancestral domain in the Cordillera region from an indigenous perspective, [17] wrote that the IPs tend to convert common property regimes into individual property regimes through various means such as land titling, land declarations, water rights application, and forest stand privatization. She said that "this is due to the degree of improvements, through material and labor inputs, on the land (forest, swidden) that was originally a common property resource under the classification of *communal* and *corporate*."

She [20] further observed that this scheme in effect disenfranchised other members in the community, who previously enjoyed the advantage of communal ownership. A rather clever manipulation of the national legal system and the indigenous legal system, through *Legal Pluralism* are

employed by individuals. According to her, customary laws are often used as access to gain national laws, such as tax declarations and titles “to legitimize their ownership within the village, vis-à-vis the national system.” Whereas, the national law is invoked in order to “legitimize land ownership against claimants, vis-à-vis customary law. For instance, the acquisition of paper titles or government tenurial instruments to show proof of ownership to a piece of land traditionally owned as common property of a group.”

Moreover, [20] noted that *Legal Pluralism* has direct bearing in the management of national parks such as in the case of Mt. Pulag which was placed under state management through the IPRA. However, he further observed that poor governance of the park was attributed to the lack of manpower and funding. On the other hand, he noticed that local inhabitants from within the park, have other recourse of encroaching the area through the Department of Agriculture’s advocacy of raising the production of temperate vegetables. On an important note, [20] explained that whenever the local inhabitants could hardly access these areas, they circumvent the system by invoking “customary rights based on a history of settlement and resource use.” This reality so far reflects the failure to conserve the parks.

4.8. Breaches and Gaps: Recognition of Ancestral Land and Ancestral Domain

Records reveal the breaches as to the awarding of CADC by the DENR as it deviates from the standard procedure [18]. For instance, certificates were not given to the indigenous communities, but to the municipalities due to some ADMP related issues. Moreover, the consensual support of the government in the awarding of certificates of ancestral domain in a way created an impetus among the IPs to acquire certificates of land ownership. In doing so, claimants exhaust all legitimate remedies such as invoking both indigenous and national laws, whichever is deemed advantageous to them.

There is also the observance of uncoordinated views among government instrumentalities concerning the management of resources. For instance, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) pursues the protection of the forests, through policies of forest regeneration, while the Department of Agriculture (DA) encourages farm produce [17]. As a consequence, more pine trees and mossy forests are converted into agricultural farms. This is also true to the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) with differing policies and outlooks in the management of resources. More than that, a problem also arises from the opposing laws on resource management at the local level, such as the forestry law that restricts land use on 18% and above slopes, among others. The rather irreconcilable objectives of the aforesaid concerned agencies project differing views of development.

5. The Benguet Experience

5.1. Mt. Data National Park: Background and Issues

Caught within the intricacies of land management and

issuance of certificates/titles of ancestral lands and domains, problems ensue as to how to strike the balance between individual and sustainable development. The case of newly founded communities such as that in Mt. Data National Park situated along the boundaries of Benguet and Mt. Province, reflects the complexity of state policies in land resource management.

In retrospect [22], Mt. Data was one of the first areas to be declared a national park by the American colonial government. It was proclaimed a national park through Proclamation No. 634 issued on Oct. 8, 1941. Its mandate was limited to a general prohibition against all extractive activities within the park and the relocation of settlers. However, in recent years, vegetable gardens have taken over almost 70 percent of the park. According to DENR Cordillera, we are left with only a total of 5,512-hectare woodland. It serves as a watershed serving several towns in Benguet, Mt. Province, and the town of Hungduan in Ifugao.

Recently, there was the proposal for its disestablishment as a protected area, allegedly because the park had become so degraded due to the park’s conversion into vegetable farms. This was rejected by DENR officials due to a possible snowball effect, wherein some local governments hosting other national parks may also seek reclassification. “DENR rejects Mt. Data downgrade” [22] that government officials have been working since 2001 to declare Mount Data as part of the National Integrated Protected Areas System (Nipas). The DENR added that “placing Mount Data under Nipas does not require the eviction of forest settlers as feared by the area’s indigenous communities. The ... “presence of indigenous peoples inside protected areas is proof that indigenous forest management systems are effective.” [22]

5.2. Mt. Pulag National Park: Background and Issues

Meanwhile, Mt. Pulag, known as Luzon’s highest peak, has a total area of 11,560-hectare was already inhabited before its proclamation as a national park. It cut across the towns of Kabayan, Bokod, and Buguias in Benguet; the town of Tinoc in Ifugao; and Kayapa town in Nueva Vizcaya. Just like other settlers along the Mt. Data Park, highland farming is the main most villages within the perimeters of Mt. Pulag.

In Kabayan, (one of the few municipalities awarded with CADC), Ibaloy and Kalanguya communities in here wanted to actively participate in the worsening problem of resource management in the area. Recently, a proposal to form management zones is looked upon as a solution to save the remaining mossy forests from agricultural intrusion.

As observed [23] the inhabitants within the area of the national park, openly hunt and plant despite prior knowledge of it being proclaimed as a protected area by the government. A local official suggests that zoning strategy shall be adapted as a viable measure to preserve the remaining forests. Although, he was quick to say that the indigenous inhabitants shall be consulted to avoid conflict. It was alleged by the residents, the Ibaloy and Kalanguyas, that there was no prior consultation and coordination when the said area was declared as part of the national park.

Eighty percent of the park is comprised of the majority barangays of Kabayan. The inhabitants herein regard Mt. Pulag as the “playground of the gods.” Based on the report [23], the lure of vegetable farming prompted many Pulag residents, to depend on highland vegetable production. He said that this was made possible as a consequence of the awarding of almost two thousand hectares of land by the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) certificates that warrant land ownership to some applicant in the early 90’s only to be canceled by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) few years thereafter.

Just recently, the 2010 Book, “Biodiversity and Natural Resources Management in the Mt. Pulag National Park, reveals the fact a considerable portion of the park was converted into agricultural purposes. This was perpetrated by the “tamed law enforcement.” On an important note, [23] says that the expanding farms are the “single most destructive activity that threatens all biodiversity and natural resources” of the park as attested by the DENR in 2015 upon the completion of its over-all survey setting the metes and bounds of the national park.

As early as 2000, there were already preliminary talks regarding a proposed management areas Program to protect and preserve the remaining areas of the park. Unfortunately, there was vehement rejection by the residents who strongly depend on tax declarations or by invoking their land recognition as ancestral lands under the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act of 1997, or under the guise of Legal Pluralism as earlier discussed.

The findings [23] also highlights the factors making the proposed zoning unattainable according to the DENR. He said that the loose issuance of tax declarations to applicants, as well as the overlapping boundaries of ancestral domain, render zoning as a complicated option, most specially on the areas previously occupied. Pulag’s area superintendent of the adjacent municipalities of Bokod and Buguias also attests that the farmers argued that they have free access to convert these resources into agricultural farms as legitimate dwellers of the place. She added that road access built by the government added to the rapid denudation of the forest since heavy equipment is easily transported to clear more areas for agricultural purposes. This prompted a former local executive official to assert that the park shall be managed by the people themselves.

5.3. National Laws and Customary Laws: Tools for Development?

What makes the discourse between National Laws and Customary Laws in Benguet and the rest of IP communities in the Philippines is its significant impact on development. Again, it weighs more on land ownership as a core political issue over its applicability to other aspects of indigenous existence. After all, the distortion of customary laws, in general, is rooted in colonization. The evolution of national laws is characterized by colonial administrative succession which was subsequently inherited by post-colonial regimes. In the end, the superimposition of national laws as derived

from the inherent power of the state, resulted in the eventual decay of customary laws, at least on the area of ancestral lands and ancestral domain claims. This was in response to the rapidly diminishing land resources and the continuing growth of IP population who are helpless in embracing national laws for security reasons.

Research shows that the majority of landowners in Benguet prefer to undergo the rigorous process of land titling and tax declaration application, over the less expensive customary processes. Accordingly, such a pragmatic approach was in response to a growing culture of distrust among some members of the community. More importantly, payment of real taxes over their landholdings is an assurance of legitimate ownership and security. Consequently, the preference of documents as proof of ownership defines the new contours of legal and judicial processes in today’s IP communities.

However, a notable experience is worth pondering at the moment. The 1900s is a period to reckon since it commences the gradual erosion of customary laws through state policies that eventually disenfranchised the IPs of their lands. At present, the IPRA Law reinforced their customary rights in the management of their resources, thereby opening an opportunity to regain the lands originally belonging to them. This time through rigid procedures unlike the less bureaucratic Regalian scheme of converting traditionally owned but undocumented lands in favor of the state.

5.4. IP Governance and Empowerment Under Ipra

The State recognizes the inherent right of ICCs/IPs to self-governance and self-determination and respects the integrity of their values, practices, and institutions. Consequently, the State shall guarantee the right of ICCs/IPs to freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. (Sec. 13, IPRA).

In a critical analysis, [14] asserts that understanding the role of indigenous peoples in Philippine governance and politics entails addressing three crucial questions: (1) What is the main political issue raised by the indigenous peoples? (2) How have they pursued their advocacy? (3) What have been some of the results of the advocacy and activism of the IP social movement in the Philippines?

As discussed earlier, land ownership is at the core of IPs political issue. This was manifested by the IPs’ massive protests against the State’s major projects that encroached their treasured land. Again, this was the result of the opposing view of claims of land ownership of the State’s Regalian Doctrine and the indigenous conception of land ownership.

Although IP rights advocacy was continuous, which gained momentum during the Corazon Aquino presidency. This was evident from the onset of Chico mobilization and redemocratization period as well as the inclusion of the autonomy provision in the constitution, up to the passage of the IPRA Law and the subsequent creation of the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP).[14]

Unfortunately, this office did not fairly accomplish its feat due to justifiable reasons. But one thing for sure, [14] pointed out that the state is committed to promoting national interest within the context of “national security, national integration, and national development.” The irony according to her, is the reality that the central government is never expected to understand these issues from an IPs viewpoint. One thing more, there is internal fragmentation among the IPs themselves as seen in the disunity of stands regarding pressing issues of their concern, such as mining and other extractive activities. In the end, she concluded that the IPs’ movement did not hit the mark because of the inherent tension between the State and civil society.

When asked about the changes brought about by IPRA, most of the respondents pointed out the significance of IP recognition by the government itself. At least, Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) scheme, for instance legitimately involved them in proposed community projects. Moreover, the concept of sustainable development gradually sips into the IP’s understanding. However, they also agree that processes under IPRA are sometimes “politicized,” to their detriment.

5.4.1. Indigenous Peoples Organization and the Council of Elders

The advent of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, recognizes the vital role of Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) in IP governance [21]. These organizations so far are partly responsible for the identification of ancestral lands and ancestral domains. As mentioned by an IPO leader, their participation matters most in the pursuance of sustainable plans and developments in the IP community. However, problems are encountered such as the lack of funding among some IPOs. Other respondents also claim that IPs are deprived of substantial participation in the decision- making process, most especially at the national level. Moreover, other respondents claim that sometimes, IPs have no direct participation in national projects of their concern.

According to the respondents, IPOs are supposedly the vanguard of IP rights but unfortunately, there are only a few recognized organizations capable of pursuing and protecting legitimate and collective interests and aspirations of the indigenous cultural communities in Benguet. Thus, IP leaders clamor for government support and commitment for the creation of more IPOs as well as the re-invigoration of those already existing.

In relation thereto, the researcher found out that the IPs of Benguet do not fully understand the significance of IPOs in ICC governance. The lack of functioning IPOs, therefore, is attributed to this reason at the same time indicative of low political consciousness. One respondent claim that lack of education and training contributes to a rather passive role of IPOs and the lack of LGU’s support on this matter aggravates the situation.

6. Cordillera Autonomy: An unrealized option

for Regional Development

The national government envisions regional autonomy as an option to alleviate the condition of the marginalized indigenous peoples in the country. In the Cordillera experience, two failed plebiscites revealed the total rejection by the IPs, who by an ethnic sovereign exercise, sealed the fate of regional development. The wisdom behind its introduction and the reasons behind its successive rejection was thoroughly articulated by scholars, but it seems that such knowledge is only confined within the circles of the *Baguio Intelligencia* but not among the rest of the indigenous masses. Hitherto, the import of its significance failed to penetrate the confused and curious minds in the grassroots. It is indeed this political disconnect that an exigent probe is preferred over speculations and rhetoric. Significantly, it is the voice from below that affirms, but only after the letters of the *Act* are ingrained in captivity of the IPs mind. An aggressive pursuit towards this endeavor inevitably proves the worth an *Autonomy* may offer.

6.1. Background

The advent of a unitary government under colonial rule resulted in an assimilation crisis among the indigenous peoples in the Cordilleras. The supplanting of the indigenous political system through policies inimical to the interests of the IPs themselves, led to their extreme marginalization in the recent past. The problem is deeply rooted in its being sovereign during the long period of colonialism, which paved the way to the development of indigenous political institutions responsible for molding their political culture. So far, post-colonial regimes embarked on national policies supposedly aimed at alleviating the deplorable conditions of the IPs in the Cordilleras. The landmark attempt towards this direction was the institutionalization of regional autonomy as an option for development.

The highly centralized political system just like the Philippines considers the grant of autonomy a viable option to development. However, government measures centered on an inclusive development mission, intended to bring development closer to the IPs so far remains in limbo. This must be reflected in the rather passive result of two consecutive plebiscites that derailed a supposed offer for development.

Regional autonomy is an innovation under the 1987 Constitution, which is not found in the previous charters of the country. It envisions an establishment of a new political regional unit with independent voting constituents. It goes beyond decentralization which calls for the creation of regional autonomous government.

6.2. Political Structure

In the Cordillera experience, two Organic Acts (RA 6766 and RA 8438) were passed introducing new political structures, with the Regional Governor as the highest head, assisted by a Cabinet. It is also comprised of Regional Assembly and a Regional Executive Department. These

regional positions incidentally became the cause of intra-ethnic group competition that contributed to the derailment of the prospective CAR. As observed [14], the culture of distrust as to who would run the regional government was blamed as the major cause of the unfulfilled autonomy. In recollection, the first plebiscite in 1990 failed with the lone province of Ifugao voting in the affirmative; while only the province of Apayao voted for *yes* in the succeeding plebiscite in 1998.

6.3. Failed Bid for Regional Autonomy

Accordingly [14], the issue of the Cordillera Region is multilayered. The first issue is on the way of defining the divisions of powers and functions between the national government and the LGUs. Whereas the second issue is on the assertion of the right to self-determination by the peoples of the Cordilleras, that is a clamor for a more viable political unit, and not simply an administrative one. On an important note, however, there was the alleged failure of proponents of Regional Autonomy to provide such a convincing specification of content.

6.4. Cordillera Autonomy in the Grassroots

A personal interface with the IPs in the outskirts of Benguet reveals one thing. Most of the respondents said that they are aware of the issue of Cordillera Autonomy but are poorly informed about it. Local officials in the barangays shared with this sentiment, admitting that even they are loosely oriented about the salient features of the issue.

Resulting therefrom is the failure to understand the pros and cons of Cordillera Autonomy. Moreover, major issues are not threshed out to reach their understanding because of the lack of information drive. According to them, conferences and forum are conducted only in the central business hubs, and only a few of them were able to attend. They complained that concerned government agencies, including the LGU's, failed to allot ample time to reach them, specifically the poor and the uneducated in the outskirts.

When asked about their view regarding the unfulfilled autonomy in the past (twice rejected), they said that the rejection was attributed to the absence of well-informed and politically conscious decisions. A key informant said, "how can we agree on something we absolutely do not understand?" However, they responded positively about more active involvement on a third attempt, on the condition that they will be informed and educated about it. The uncertainty on whether or not Cordillera Autonomy brings genuine development among the tribes accordingly depends on the ability of the government to bridge this political disconnect.

7. Conclusion

An uphill struggle describes the clamor for development among typical indigenous communities like Benguet. The abundant resources found within the stretch of its topographic advantage does not warrant sound development amid political instability brought about by the opposing

outlook of development between the State on one hand, and the indigenous peoples on the other. State policies as to IP governance and empowerment is crucial towards an attempt to homogenize cultural pluralism as a viable means of winning the IPs cooperation towards the common desire for development. Striking the balance, however, was marred by the complexities brought about by the historical injustices committed among the indigenous communities in the past, as well as the inability to address IP concerns through recent state policies such as the constitutional accommodation for regional autonomy, as an option for development. A derailed autonomy so far proved the significance of IPs' role in the grassroots. The passage of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) on the other hand, was met with insurmountable challenges, and its efficacy on certain aspects, a subject of serious consideration by the State. Moreover, there is an urgency of a thorough study regarding the major development-related issues that could somehow offer an optimistic outlook of future development.

In relation thereto, the following recommendations are provided for the concerned government entities: There shall be a sincere move on the part of the government to address or at least mitigate the impacts of historical injustices committed on the IP communities in Benguet. The eventual control by private entities of the dams and mining firms shall in no way excuse the government from their prescribed obligations to compensate those victims of force evictions from the dams. Likewise, environmental degradation caused by commercial mines shall be addressed. At least an effort to provide minimal livelihood assistance to the victims will in a way tame their hostile attitude towards the government.

On the part of the IPs, this is where the role of vibrant Indigenous Peoples Organization (IPOs) in partnership with the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) comes in, with the full support of their respective LGU's. Thus, LGU's shall be actively involved in conducting training to maximize the potentials of these indigenous entities.

For the lawmakers, most especially the solons from the Cordillera Administrative Region to exhaust legislative tax measures in congress for the possibility of reverting taxes of these resources from the national government to the concerned LGUs. Moreover, their vigilance regarding the proposed construction of more mini-hydro projects in the Cordillera provinces is highly solicited. For instance, the *Renewable Energy Law* reflects a very low share on local taxes, in a sense, a continuum of historical injustice.

Likewise, on mining issues, a decisive clamor for amendments of mining laws that are inimical to environmental interest shall be strengthened. However, in a pragmatic sense, IP communities may enter into a memorandum of agreement with the mining firms and with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). Through this scheme, the mining company may shoulder the educational expenses of qualified IP members in acquiring the necessary skills for a living, or any other measures of analogous circumstances.

On the issue of ancestral domain, specifically on resource management, concerned agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Department of Agriculture, (DA), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), as well as concerned NGO's, shall sit down together to reconcile their conflicting views on development as well as overlapping functions and advocacies. The issue of sustainable development matters most in saving the scarce resources already in danger of depletion. Moreover, a stronger political will is needed to realize the noble objective behind management zoning, which was partially implemented in opposition by many residents, over the rest of the uninhabited portion of the Benguet forests, declared as communal reservation. In this way, the application for tax declaration shall be halted in the name of sustainable development.

One crucial issue also on IP governance and empowerment is the states' commitment in promoting national interest within the purview of the state and is never expected to understand these issues from an IPs' viewpoint. Hence, IP communities shall always embark on alternative legitimate routes and options to pursue their objectives. Say, for instance, resurrecting the issue of converting the present Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) into a regular region, as an alternative to Cordillera Autonomy.

However, if the state is committed to pursuing regional autonomy, then it is recommended to penetrate the bailiwick of the IPs at the grassroots level. As per the researcher's finding in the outskirts of Benguet, (it passively voted for *no to autonomy* in the previous plebiscites) the informants, including barangay officials claimed that they are aware but are not informed of the salience of autonomy. Therefore, a need to fund massive information campaigns through the concerned agencies, in partnership with the LGUs is highly recommended. Their willingness to understand the concept thereof is a manifestation of a positive response to what autonomy can offer them. Such a political disconnect shall be bridged immediately in order not to waste time and resources, in any future attempt for regional autonomy.

8. Future Scope

This study is just a scratch on the surface of ethnicity and politics in the region. Although, it is the intention of the researcher to conduct future analogous collaborative studies in the other provinces of the Cordilleras (Ifugao, Mt. Province, Abra, Kalinga, and Apayao). On a certain point Benguet province is the melting pot of Cordillera tribes. On a note, topographic barriers as well as want of funding delimits the scope of the study. Interestingly, the effects of migration to this heterogenous ethnic communities, as well as the impacts of globalization shall be subject of future research.

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