

## CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN THE PROVINCE OF ILOCOS SUR, PHILIPPINES

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the extent of observance of the cultural practices of the tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. The respondents of this study were the federated officials of the tribal communities in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. This study employed the descriptive survey research with a questionnaire as an instrument in data gathering. The researchers' findings and conclusions are as follows: Despite the fact that people are now living in the modern age, the tribal communities still preserved some of their cultural practices. Much of the value system being practiced by the tribal communities since the early days is still presently observed. The traditional justice system is sometimes observed by them. Their observance of value system and traditional justice system brings some degree of prosperity to their families and community. In the political arena, the upland areas in the Upland areas of Ilocos Sur, Philippines are better prepared as a result of observance and institutionalization of their value system and traditional justice system and also improve their social lives. It is recommended by the researchers that the tribal communities should try to understand the wisdom of their cultural practices which they inherited from their ancestors. They should retain what is good and beneficial, but should not follow the dogma or have no scientific meaning and relevance.

**Keywords:** Cultural Practices, Tribal Communities, Ethnic Study

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### 1. Introduction and Purpose

The fourteen (14) Upland municipalities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines are inhabited by tribal communities and these are the municipalities of Alilem, Banayoyo, Cervantes, Galimuyod, Gregorio del Pilar, Lidlidda, Quirino, Salcedo, San Emilio, Sigay, Suyu, Sugpon, Nagbukel and Burgos. The three tribal communities that dominate the said upland municipalities and shares distinct cultural practices are the Kankanaeys, Tinguians and the Bagos.

Culture, according to Buaquen (2003), is handed down from generation to generation, learned by a person in the course of his development as a member of a particular society, so that in the course of time, some are forgotten and some are changed or have undergone renewal or modernization.

Customs of the tribal communities are recognized as form part of the legal system in the Philippines. Under section 399 (Paragraph f) of the Local Government Code of the Philippines, information has been provided that in barangays, where majority of the inhabitants are members of indigenous cultural communities, local systems through their councils of *datus* or elders shall be recognized without prejudice to the applicable provisions of the Code. On the other hand, article 11 of the Civil Code of the Philippines states that customs which are contrary to law, public order or public policy shall not be countenanced. According to Chief Justice Cayetano Arellano, as cited by Paras (1989), a custom is a rule of human action established by

repeated acts and uniformly observed or practiced as a rule of society, through the implicit approval of the lawmakers, and which is; therefore, generally obligatory and legally binding. Several laws protect the rights of the Indigenous Cultural/tribal Communities in the Philippines. Article II, Section 22 of the Constitution emphasizes that the State recognizes and promotes the rights of indigenous cultural communities within the framework of national unity and development.

Tribal communities are given the privilege to be represented in the local legislative bodies. Under sections 446 and 447 of the Republic Act No. 7160 otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991 explicitly provide that in addition to the regular members of the Sangguniang Bayan and Sangguniang Panlalawigan, there shall be three (3) sectoral representatives: one (1) from the women; and, as shall be determined by the sanggunian concerned within ninety (90) days prior to the holding of local elections, one (1) from the agricultural or industrial workers; and one (1) from the other sectors, including the urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, or disabled persons.

The tribal communities in the province are usually governed by a council and their center of operation is the *abong* or *dap-ay* which is made mostly of bamboos, wood and cogon. It serves also as a guard house and the seat for social gatherings of the community. The council decides disputes in the community and the administration of justice is through the *sapit* – a process of investigation and execution of punishment by the council. *Sapit* is a heart to heart talk between the offended party and the offender in the presence of the council applying the principle of "just between us as brothers". The council, after thorough investigation and after hearing both sides of the parties, imposes fines or punishment and their decision is usually final and executory. The council is chaired by a person who is most experienced and already exposed to community affairs. Its composition, however, are trusted people in the community because of their wisdom, dignity and leadership qualities. They are not necessarily the *lallakay* or *baknang* in the community.

Though laws are enacted to protect and strengthen the cultural practices of the indigenous communities, Azurin, (1991) however, opined that it may seem now when globalization is seeping in, that the traces of the complex Ilocano-Igorot confluence, so keenly explored in the past by contemporary authors, are on the verge of a fade-away reality. Indeed, the Upland Ilocano ethnic tradition is slowly changing in quest of equilibrium with global cultures. In time, just like in the urbanized communities of the lowlands, these tribal practices will simply be engraved in the ancient history of the upland municipalities to be remembered in dances and songs, and to be dramatized in modern tribal gatherings.

In the study of Alviento and Nisperos(2008), they mentioned that the tribal communities are the more than 12 million descendants of the original inhabitants of the Philippines archipelago who have somehow managed to resist centuries of colonization and in the process have retained their own customs, traditions and life ways. Some even believed that these indigenous people are gradually fading because of rapid commercialization and modernization.

This study is undertaken to find out the extent of observance of the cultural practices, value system and the traditional justice system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the cultural practices of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents with respect to the following socio-demographic factors along age, sex, civil status, language or dialect dominantly spoken, educational attainment, religious affiliation, source of income, and membership in the tribal community?
2. What is the extent of observance of the cultural practices of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines along baptism, courtship, wedding and wake?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and their extent of observance on their cultural practices?
4. What is the extent of observance of the value system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines along cooperativism, volunteerism, docility, honesty, act of sharing, and trustworthiness?
5. What is the extent of observance of the traditional justice system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines?
6. What is the impact level of the observance of value systems and traditional justice system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines in terms of the following aspects: economic, political, and social?

## 3. Methodology

This portion presents the research design, population, data gathering instrument, data gathering procedure, and statistical treatment used in this study.

**Research Design.** This study made use of the descriptive method of research with the questionnaire as the main data gathering instrument.

**Population of the Study.** The respondents of this study were the nine (9) tribal federated officials, the chieftain and eight (8) elders in every municipality.

**Data Gathering Instrument.** The questionnaire was formulated by the researchers based from the cultural practices, value system and tradition justice system which are commonly practiced by the tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines.

The questionnaire is composed of three parts: the first is the personal profile of the respondents, second part deals with the indicators of cultural practices, value system and traditional justice system of the tribal communities. The Third part is concerned with determining the impact level of the observance of value system and traditional justice system along economic, political and social aspects.

The range of values for the numerical rating used for the extent of observance of mores and tradition of the tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines is indicated by the descriptive rating and their equivalent as follows:

Rating Scale	Quantitative Equivalent	Descriptive Rating
5	4.21 – 5.00	Always (A)
4	3.41 – 4.20	Often (O)
3	2.61 – 3.40	Sometimes (S)
2	1.81 – 2.60	Very Rare (VR)
1	1.00 - 1.80	Not Observed (NO)

The range of values for the numerical rating used for the impact level of the observance of the value system and traditional justice system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos

Sur, Philippines along economic, political and social aspects is indicated by the descriptive rating and their equivalent as follows:

<b>Rating Scale</b>	<b>Quantitative Equivalent</b>	<b>Descriptive Rating</b>
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High (VH)
4	3.41 – 4.20	High (H)
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderately High (MH)
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low (L)
1	1.00 - 1.80	Very Low (VL)

**Data Gathering Procedure-** The researchers floated the questionnaire personally with the help of their students who are residents from the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. They first asked permission from the Regional and Provincial offices of the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), as well as some local officials in the municipalities where the instrument was floated. The questionnaire was retrieved after the respondents accomplished by answering the instrument. After gathering all the questionnaires, data was then tallied and interpreted.

**Statistical Treatment of Data-** The following are the statistical tools used in the treatment of data in this study:

1. Frequency and Percentage were used to determine the profile of the respondents.
2. Weighted Mean was used to determine the extent of observance of the cultural practices, value systems, traditional justice system and impact level of observance along economic, political and social aspects.
3. Pearson Product Method of Correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between the personal profile of the respondents and their extent of observance of their cultural practices. In this study, the statistical program for social science (SPSS) was employed.

#### 4. Findings of the Study:

Profile of the respondents:

Less than majority (61 or 48.41 %) of the respondents belong to the age bracket of 60-69 years old, majority (88 or 69.84%) are male, married (109 or 86.5`%), speak Ilokano as common language (92 or 73.01%), many are high school graduates (32 or 25.39%), majority are Catholics (79 or 62.70%), farmers and majority are members of the Bago tribe (73 or 57.94%).

##### Extent of Observance of Cultural Practices of the Tribal Communities

###### Along Baptism

The tribal community-respondents claimed that they always invite the entire community ( $\bar{x}$ =4.48) during baptism celebration and tribal dances are performed ( $\bar{x}$ =4.35), they often observe *Kaniaw* ritual performance ( $\bar{x}$ =3.62), sometimes, they invite limited visitors only ( $\bar{x}$ =2.86) and very rarely that they celebrate baptism exclusively for immediate family members only ( $\bar{x}$ =1.94).

They always butcher cow or carabao ( $\bar{x}$ =4.36) during celebration, often native pigs are butchered ( $\bar{x}$ =3.91), and they sometimes serve varieties ( $\bar{x}$ =2.97). Likewise, they very rarely serve more chicken meat ( $\bar{x}$ =2.46) and do not observe through catering services ( $\bar{x}$ =1.58).

It implies that despite the fact that people are now living in the modern age, the tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines still preserved many of their cultural practices. This is affirmed by the statement of Buaquen(2003) who stressed that culture is handed down from generation to generation, learned by a person in the course of his development as a member of a particular society. So, in the course of time, some are forgotten and some are changed or have undergone renewal or modernization.

###### Along courtship

In the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, when the young man proposes love to the woman, it is often done through the help of a mediator ( $\bar{x}$ =4.16) and through his parents ( $\bar{x}$ =3.61) and sometimes through text message ( $\bar{x}$ =3.24), but very rarely through love letters ( $\bar{x}$ =2.36). However, courting through serenade ( $\bar{x}$ =1.36) is not observed anymore.

The tribal community-respondents also reveal that to win the heart of the woman, the young man always renders household chores or labor ( $\bar{x}$ =4.34) and often shows concern to the woman's family ( $\bar{x}$ =3.75), very rarely does the promising of giving of dowry ( $\bar{x}$ =2.12) but giving flowers and chocolate ( $\bar{x}$ =1.65) and cellphone load/pasaload( $\bar{x}$ =1.39) are not observed.

It further reveal that in the arrangement of *danon* after winning the nod of the woman, the young man always personally talks to the woman's parents ( $\bar{x}$ =4.39), sometimes he is accompanied by his parents to talk to the woman's parents ( $\bar{x}$ =3.31) and that the entire community is involved ( $\bar{x}$ =2.74). Very rare that the young man accompanied by elders to talk with the woman's parents ( $\bar{x}$ =2.18) or merely an agreement between the young man and woman ( $\bar{x}$ =2.45).

This implies that the young man, in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, still give high regard to the *albasiador* or mediator and to his parents in courting a woman as well as giving respect and concern to the woman's family by rendering household chores or labor.



### Along wedding

The tribal community-respondents stated that *tani* or child betrothal is sometimes made compulsory by the tribal law ( $\bar{x}=3.33$ ) and it depends on the wishes of both parents, ( $\bar{x}=3.17$ ) but very rare that they depend on the agreement of the young man and woman ( $\bar{x}=2.47$ ) and sometimes observed with certain conditions ( $\bar{x}=2.48$ ).

They also maintained that *kaising* or agreement by quarrelling parents to match their children is often made compulsory by the tribal law ( $\bar{x}=3.85$ ), but sometimes depends on the wishes of both parents ( $\bar{x}=2.75$ ), depends on the agreement of the young man and woman ( $\bar{x}=2.61$ ) and it is observed, but with certain conditions ( $\bar{x}=3.32$ ).

This implies that *tani* or child betrothal and *kaising* or agreement by the quarrelling parents to match their children is not an issue during marriage among the tribal communities.

### Along gift giving

The tribal community-respondents always give blanket ( $\bar{x}=4.59$ ) and money ( $\bar{x}=4.68$ ) as gifts during wedding celebration, sometimes cavans of rice ( $\bar{x}=3.12$ ); but giving native things or kinds ( $\bar{x}=1.83$ ) or kitchen utensils ( $\bar{x}=1.68$ ) is very rarely observed. They also reveal that during the wedding celebration, the entire community is always invited ( $\bar{x}=4.70$ ) and tribal dances are performed ( $\bar{x}=4.61$ ), very rarely that limited visitors are invited ( $\bar{x}=2.38$ ), *kaniaw* ritual is sometimes performed, ( $\bar{x}=2.53$ ) but celebrate with exclusive for immediate members only ( $\bar{x}=1.96$ ) is not observed by them.

Further, the tribal communities maintained that they always butcher cow or *carabao* ( $\bar{x}=4.31$ ) and native pigs during wedding celebrations, ( $\bar{x}=4.46$ ) but sometimes they serve more chicken meat ( $\bar{x}=3.11$ ) and catering services ( $\bar{x}=1.49$ ) are not observed by them.

This implies that the tribal communities show solidarity during wedding celebrations where everyone has the opportunity to feast and socialize.

### Along mourning of the death

The tribal communities revealed that they always perform prayer ( $\bar{x}=4.21$ ) and *del-leng* or recite/chant sorrows in a mourning tune ( $\bar{x}=4.48$ ) when mourning is done. However, the departure ceremonies ( $\bar{x}=3.47$ ) are often done, but a cleansing ceremony ( $\bar{x}=3.37$ ) is sometimes observed by them during mourning.

It likewise revealed that they very rarely forbid yawning while attending the wake of the dead ( $\bar{x}=2.32$ ), wearing certain colors of dress ( $\bar{x}=2.36$ ) and partaking in the funeral banquet if the dead is one of the children ( $\bar{x}=2.36$ ) while embalming the dead ( $\bar{x}=1.38$ ) is not forbidden.

The findings reveal that tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines are able to preserve some of their century old practices while mourning and that they still follow some dogma on rituals which are considered forbidden by their traditions.

Significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the Level of observance of their cultural practices on baptism, courtship, wedding and wake

Variables	Baptism	Courtship	Wedding	Wake
Age	-.017	.038	.074	-.024
Sex	-.047	.020	.191*	.015
Civil status	.040	.000	.049	.018
Language dominantly used	-.029	.113*	-.036	-.022
Educational attainment	.074	.050	-.084	-.025
Religious Affiliation	.171**	.160**	-.020	.049
Main Source of Income	-.099	-.123*	.005	.044
Membership in the tribal community	.161**	.006	.176**	-.038

*Legend:*

- \* - significant at .05 level
- \*\* - significant at .01 level

As revealed in the table, personal profile variables that are found to be significantly correlated with the observance of their cultural practices are the respondent's sex on wedding practices (r - .191\*), religious affiliation along baptism (r .171\*\*) and courtship (r - .160\*\*) and membership in the tribal community on baptism (r .161\*\*) and wedding practices (r - .176\*\*).

This means that language used, religious affiliation, main source of income and membership in the tribal community plays a very important role in the observance the cultural practices of the respondents. Meaning, the more the native language is used, religious a person is, the higher is his conviction to remain an advocate of their cultural practices. Finally, his membership to the tribe speaks of his devotion to observance of cultural practices. It means that the more he remains loyal to his tribe, the higher is his adherence to observance of cultural practices.

Extent of observance of the value system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur along cooperativism, volunteerism, docility, honesty, act of sharing, and trustworthiness

Along Value System

Along cooperativism, the tribal community-respondents reveal that they always cooperate in beautifying their barangays or village ( $\bar{x}$ =4.71) and in farming ( $\bar{x}$ =4.27). However, they sometimes volunteer in building a house ( $\bar{x}$ =3.39) and very rarely do they cooperate in pottering dried palay to the granaries ( $\bar{x}$ =1.91).

Along volunteerism, the tribal community-respondents admitted that they always volunteer in the building of the *sapao* ( $\bar{x}$ =4.28), washing of dishes ( $\bar{x}$ =4.31) and collects *saranay* ( $\bar{x}$ =4.21) during wedding celebrations and in mourning. They often ( $\bar{x}$ =4.19) volunteer to borrow utensils and returning them after.

Along docility, the tribal community-respondents often submit to the authority of the *sapit* ( $\bar{x}$ =3.49), follow the advice of the elders ( $\bar{x}$ =3.57), obey the laws and regulations of the community ( $\bar{x}$ =3.47), and comply with an agreement ( $\bar{x}$ =3.55).

Along honesty, the tribal community-respondents disclosed that they often give share to their community ( $\bar{x}$ =3.41), pay taxes to the government( $\bar{x}$ =3.84), not taking advantage to the weak( $\bar{x}$ =3.79), and give tithe to the church ( $\bar{x}$ =3.59).

Along act of sharing, the tribal community-respondents admitted that they always share vegetables to others ( $\bar{x}=4.52$ ), sometimes practice the “*pinnadigo*” to neighbors ( $\bar{x}=3.22$ ) and share a book to the day care center ( $\bar{x}=3.21$ ) but very rarely share fish catch to others ( $\bar{x}=2.85$ ).

Along trustworthiness, the tribal community-respondents reveal that they always welcome to their houses even unknown visitors ( $\bar{x}=4.60$ ), and often that lost animals are expected to be returned by the one who find them ( $\bar{x}=3.78$ ), doors are open even no one is inside ( $\bar{x}=4.07$ ) and they keep promises secrets ( $\bar{x}=3.76$ ).

As a whole, the tribal communities in the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines often observe their value system.

This implies that many of the value system being practiced by the tribal communities since the early days are still presently observed and this is revealed in their spirit of oneness among themselves especially in beautifying and cleaning their place and willingness to cooperate when their services are needed. This finding affirms the statement of Alviento and Nisperos (2008) that the tribal communities have somehow managed to resist centuries of colonization and in the process have retained their own customs, traditions and life ways.

#### Extent of observance of the traditional justice system of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines

The tribal community-respondents revealed that disputes in the community are often ( $\bar{x}=4.19$ ) decided by the council and that the administration of justice is through the “*sapit*” ( $\bar{x}=4.17$ ). However, the offenders are sometimes ( $\bar{x}=3.34$ ) obligated to shoulder meals for the council during the *sapit* hearing. Nonetheless, they very rarely observe to request the offenders to bring out *tapeyor* rice wine for the council as he receives advices ( $\bar{x}=2.52$ ) and that the offenders are very rarely ( $\bar{x}=2.41$ ) provides snacks for the people present during the *sapit*.

On the imposition of penalty on the other hand, the respondents perceived that fines or giving back the rightful owner of something that has been stolen is always ( $\bar{x}=4.62$ ) imposed by the *sapit*. They however, often ( $\bar{x}=4.17$ ) observe that banishment is imposed to habitual offenders or who committed adultery or rape or to those who didn't comply with the council's verdict. *While* free labor, either for the community or to the offended party, is sometimes imposed ( $\bar{x}=3.32$ ), and the offender sometimes requires going around the community, beating a drum while shouting what he had done and advising the community not to follow his offense ( $\bar{x}=2.46$ ). Lashings or *bauton* the other hand, is very rarely imposed by them ( $\bar{x}=2.55$ ).

As a whole, the traditional justice system or *sapit* in the Upland Municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines are sometimes observed as revealed by the respondents with the computed weighted of 3.38 mean value.

It implies that the legal system as observed and revealed by the respondents is certainly preserve by the tribal communities in the upland areas of the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. However, there are some practices that they very rarely observed perhaps those are no longer relevant to the modern time.

#### Impact level of the observance of value systems and Justice System of the tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, in terms of economic, political, and social aspects



### Economic Impact

The tribal communities in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines claimed to have moderately high impact level of the observance of their value system and traditional justice system on their economic life as supported by the computed weighted mean of 3.43. They mentioned that their observance of their value system and traditional justice system assures prosperity to their family and community by having more fruitful harvest and more profit in business thus, it improves their living standards.

### Political impact

They revealed that there exists a high impact level of observance of their value system and traditional justice system to their political life as community dwellers as supported by the computed weighted mean of 3.63. This implies that the political arena is better prepared for the residents of the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur through the observance and institutionalization of their value system and traditional justice system.

### Social impact

The respondents admitted that through the observance of their value system and traditional justice system, it could strengthen their family ties ( $\bar{x}=3.88$ ), instil self-discipline to the people ( $\bar{x}=3.98$ ), enhance strong commitment for the welfare of the community ( $\bar{x}=3.93$ ) and assure greater unity and cohesiveness ( $\bar{x}=3.49$ ) among the tribal communities, hence their social lives are greatly influenced. This may be due to the eradication of negative social values. Likewise, socialization activities are catalysts of interaction and change.

### **Conclusions**

The following are the conclusions made by the researchers based from the findings of the study

- a) Despite the fact that people are now living in the modern age, the tribal communities still preserved some of the cultural practices they inherited from their ancestors.
- b) The young man still gives high regard to the *albasiador* or mediator and to his parents in courting a woman, as well as giving respect and concern to the woman's family by rendering household chores or labor.
- c) The tribal communities claimed that child betrothal is sometimes observed by them and the agreement by quarrelling parents to match their children is often made compulsory by the tribal law.
- d) The tribal communities always give blankets and money as gift during wedding celebration, the entire community is always invited, and tribal dances are performed. Cow or *carabao* and native pigs are usually butchered during the celebration.
- e) They always perform prayer and *del-leng* or recite/chant sorrows in a mourning tune when mourning is done.
- f) Language used, religious affiliation, main source of income and membership in the tribal community plays a very important role in the observance the cultural practices of the respondents. The more the native language is used, religious a person is, the higher is his conviction to remain an advocate of their cultural practices. Membership to the tribe speaks of their devotion to observance of cultural practices.
- g) Many of the values being practiced by the tribal communities since the early days are still presently observed by them. This is revealed in their spirit of oneness among

themselves especially in beautifying and cleaning their place and willingness to cooperate when their services are needed.

- h) The traditional justice system in the Upland Municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines is sometimes observed by the tribal communities. However, there are some practices that they very rarely observed perhaps those are no longer relevant to the modern time.
- i) The observance of value system and traditional justice system of the tribal communities assures prosperity to their families and community by having more fruitful harvest and more profit in business thus, it improves their living standards. The political arena is better prepared for the residents of the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines through the observance and institutionalization of their value system and traditional justice system. This may be due to the eradication of negative social values. Likewise, socialization activities are catalysts of interaction and change.

### **Recommendations**

The following were recommended by the researchers based from the findings and conclusions of the study:

- 1) The tribal communities of the Upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines should try to understand the wisdom of their cultural practices which they inherited from their ancestors. They should retain what is good and beneficial, but should not follow those that have no scientific meaning and relevance.
- 2) They should always maintain to ask God for guidance through prayers because this is a practice that should not be forgotten and neglected.
- 3) The distillation of cultural practices to the youth should be given attention because this is one way of instilling to their children the love of their culture.
- 4) A yearly celebration of tribal festival and conduct of symposium or conferences, as well as organization of tribal youth organization would be of big help to strengthen the practices of their value system.
- 5) More representatives of the tribal communities should be elected or appointed in the provincial or even in national offices in the country to ensure that the interest of the tribal people will always be taken into consideration.
- 6) Further studies should be conducted by other researchers in other places using other variables particularly to find out the effectiveness of programs by the government for the welfare of the tribal communities and may consider government officials as respondents.

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