



INDIGENOUS NAVIGATOR

Data by and for Indigenous Peoples



Policy Brief 4

Indigenous Peoples and Poverty in Mindanao

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Introduction

The notion of “poverty” of/among Indigenous Peoples (IPs) is contentious for some reasons. For one, IPs themselves resent the label attached to their identity as IPs because it connotes the need for “development” programs and projects that they supposedly need, but are usually planned/conceptualized for them by outsiders (e.g. government and non-government organizations). Moreover, some indicators of poverty, like the type of housing (materials used), clothing and other material things are deemed insensitive and inappropriate to their context and culture. IPs assert that they are not poor, especially as long as they are in their ancestral domains where natural resources are usually bountiful.



Still, there are universal indicators of a better life and its reverse, poverty. These indicators are needed in order to determine (measure) the extent to which communities are improving or “developing” through time. The Human Development Index crafted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is a good reference for this. In this paper, socio-economic and human development indicators are used, such as: access to basic social services, educational and health status or outcomes. We believe that the development of human capital of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups is key to poverty alleviation and upward social mobility. This belief is aligned with one of the bundle of rights of IPs as per IPRA and UNDRIP: the right to basic social services and social justice.

This paper aims to describe the current human development indicators among Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines and, based on the situation that emerges, propose some recommendations to address the issues and concerns.

This IN policy brief number 4 should be referenced alongside IN policy brief number 5.

Methodology

This policy paper (brief) is largely based on the data from the Indigenous Navigator-Philippines (2023) and the World Bank report titled *No Data, No Story* (2024). The latter is the first ethnicity-disaggregated data and analysis, based on the 2020 Census of Philippine Households and WB’s own household survey that was conducted between 2022 and 2023.

Data and Analysis

A. POPULATION and DISTRIBUTION STATISTICS

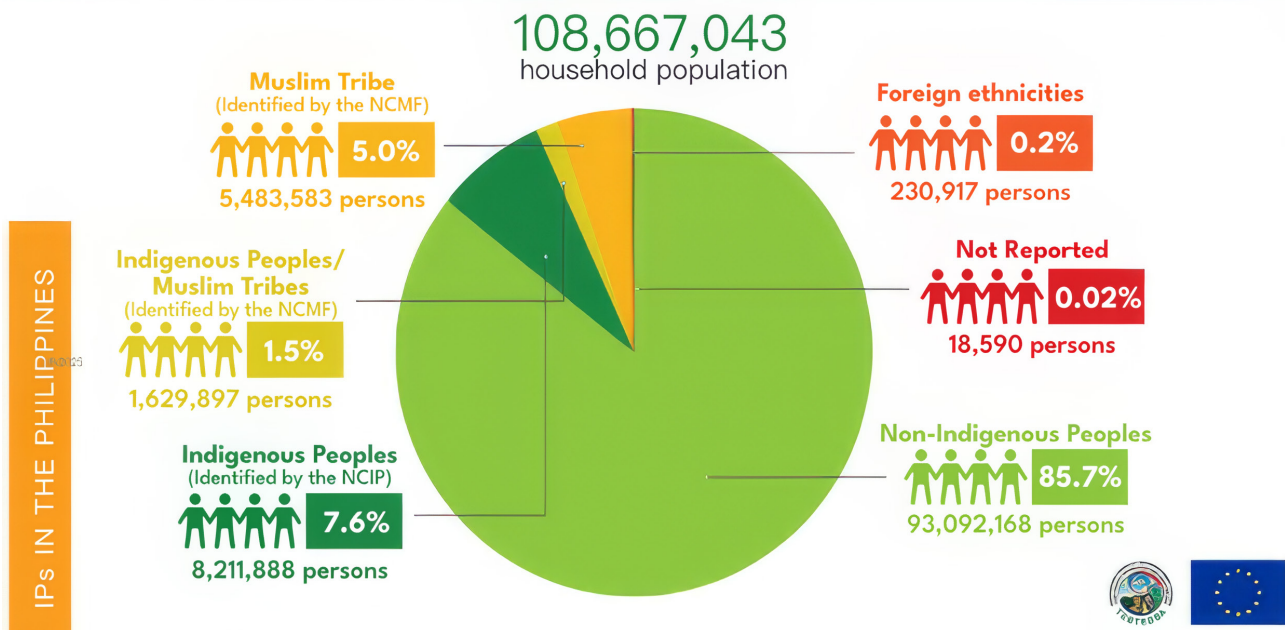
According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) Census of Population in 2020, Indigenous Peoples comprised 9.84 million or 9.1% of the 108.67 million household population, while Muslim Tribes make up 6.5% or 7.11 million of the Philippine household population.

Most IPs are geographically concentrated in Luzon and Mindanao, while members of IP & Muslim ethnic groups and Muslim ethnic groups are mostly in Mindanao. About 49 percent of IPs are in Luzon, 47 percent are in Mindanao, and 4 percent are in Visayas. Within the different regions, Mindanao’s Region XI (Davao) and Northern Mindanao represent the highest concentrations of IPs, accounting for 13.8 and 10.4 percent of the national total, respectively (WB 2024, p. 20).

Five out of ten top most populous ethnic groups are mostly in Mindanao and five are in Luzon. Based on the CPH 2020, the largest IP group is the Subanen or Subanon, with approximately 758,000 members. “The Subanen are mostly found in the northern, western, and southern portions of the Zamboanga peninsula in Mindanao. The second largest IP group is the Manobo or Manuvu, who are found mostly in SOCCSKSARGEN, with approximately 644,000 members. The Mandaya are the third largest IP group, living mostly in Davao Oriental, Davao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur. The fourth largest group is the Kankanaey, part of a collective group also known as the Igorot, with the largest

Number and Percent Distribution of Ethnic Groups in the Philippines, 2020

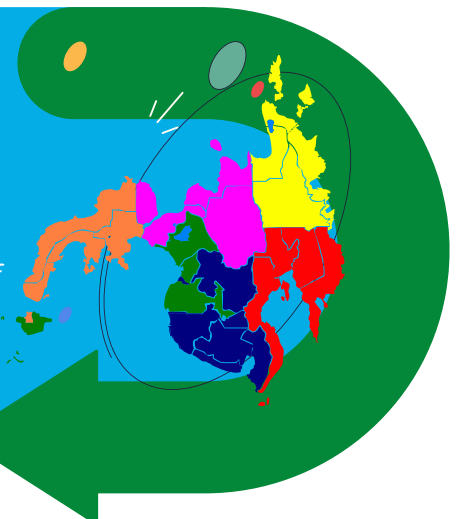
PSA, 2020 Census of Population and Housing



concentration in Luzon, particularly in northern and south-central Cordillera. The other six largest IP groups include the Ibanag, living in the Luzon's northeastern provinces of Isabela and Cagayan; the Higaonon of north-central Mindanao; the Cuyunen or Cuyunon people of the northern islands of Palawan, particularly the Cuyo Islands; the B'laan people of Southern Mindanao (Davao region), the Itawes of Cagayan Valley in Northern Luzon and the Ibaloy or Ibaloi, an indigenous group from Benguet in northern Luzon." (WB 2024, p. 23).

Among the Muslim tribes/ethnic groups, the distribution of population according to ethnic groups is as follows:

The Maguindanao is the country's largest Muslim ethnic group with 2.02 million people (28.4 percent of the total Muslims population). The Maranao are the next largest with 1.80 million (25.3 percent), followed by the Tausog/Tausug with 1.62 (22.7 percent). In addition, around 1.25 million (1.1 percent) identified as IP& Muslim ethnic groups...Most Muslim and IP & Muslim ethnic groups live in the BARMM. Based on CPH 2020, the BARMM has a total population of 4.39 million people, of which 3.43 million (78 percent) are Muslims and around 738 thousand (17 percent) are both IPs & Muslim ethnic groups, while only about 14,400 (0.3 percent) are identified as IPs (WB 2024, p. 24).



Indigeneity (who is an IP?) in the BARMM is fluid. “The archipelago’s Muslim ethnic groups have embraced the use of Moro or Muslim to identify themselves based on their historical association and profession of Islam. As an ethnic category, however, Moro comprises about 13 distinct ethnolinguistic groups, including some groups that can be defined as both IP and Muslim. While some Moros and members of Muslim ethnic groups tend not to call themselves IPs, others identify as IP & Muslim ethnic group members. According to the NCIP, IP-Muslim ethnic groups are those who embrace the Islamic faith while continuing to practice their own IP cultures and traditions. Given the region’s historical context and identity politics, calling oneself Muslim/Moro and/or IP also overlaps with issues related to historic recognition, land rights conflict, and identity. Although most IP groups in the BARMM are small, there are many of them; CPH 2020 identified a population belonging to 157 different IP groups in the region.” (WB 2024, p. 33).

B. POVERTY/MARGINALIZATION INDICATORS

The IP advocates, activists and scholars have time and again claimed that Indigenous Peoples are one, if not the most marginalized groups in the Philippines (and elsewhere). The World Bank Report (2024) provided statistical evidence on the extent of this marginalization. The results are indeed discomfoting. We highlight some of these socio-economic data (ALL of which are lifted from the WB report (2024), below:

- The IP household (HH) survey indicates that approximately 59 percent of IPs perceive themselves as poor, higher than the same rate among non-IPs (52 percent). However, while 30 percent of non-IPs consider themselves “borderline poor,” only 20 percent of IP groups perceive themselves to be in this category;
- Relative to non-IPs, IPs and Muslim ethnic groups tend to have larger households with more children, increasing care needs and exerting more pressure on resources which can impact their ability to improve living standards;
- IPs and Muslim ethnic groups households have a much larger share of young children, which can affect their ability to improve their living standards;
- Women who head households among IPs and Muslim ethnic groups seem to be more vulnerable than women from other groups. Although household gender composition is similar across ethnic groups, the proportion of women who are the head of household is much lower among Muslims (13 percent) relative to both IPs (17 percent) and non-IPs (23 percent). The marital status of women who head households also varies across ethnic groups, with over 60 percent of both IPs and Muslims female household heads widowed or separated, compared to only half among non-IPs;
- Women in Muslim ethnic groups tend to marry at younger ages and have higher fertility rates. At the national level, the share of IPs, Muslims, and IP & Muslim ethnic group women who marry before the age of 18 is at least double the share among non-IP women. This share is highest among IP & Muslim ethnic group women at 25 percent, 15 percentage points higher than the rate among non-IP women;
- In 2020, at least 75 percent of IPs and non-IPs young people aged 5 to 24 report attending school. In contrast, only 67 percent of those from Muslim ethnic groups and 62 percent of IP & Muslim ethnic groups were in school during the same period;

- School attendance rates for IP children vary across regions. School attendance rates for IP children aged 5 to 24 range between 70 and 78 percent nationally, compared to 75 to 79 percent for non-IPs. In most regions (except CAR and Cagayan Valley), school attendance rates are lower among IP children. The gap in school attendance between IP and non-IP children is particularly large in MIMAROPA and SOCCSKARGEN, where the proportion of IP children attending school is about 7 points lower than non-IP children. The disparity is particularly alarming in SOCCSKARGEN, with the country's highest level of non-IP school attendance (79 percent) but also the lowest level for IP children (70 percent);
- IPs and Muslim ethnic groups are disadvantaged by lower education levels and greater illiteracy, which hinder their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities. While most non-IP groups can read and write, about 11 percent in Muslim ethnic groups and 17 percent in IP & Muslim ethnic groups cannot. Literacy rates are relatively higher among IPs, but they also remain much lower than the national average. Literacy gaps across ethnic groups are even wider for older generations. More worrisome is low literacy rates among children aged 5 to 9. The proportion of children in this age group who are unable to read or write is high among non-IPs (13 percent), but even higher among IPs (22 percent) and Muslim ethnic groups (30 percent). Educational attainment is also considerably lower among Muslim ethnic groups and, to a lesser extent, IPs. About 16 percent of Muslim ethnic groups and 22 percent of IP & Muslim ethnic groups have no formal schooling, compared to 9 percent for IPs and 5 percent for non-IPs;
- As of 2010, Muslim ethnic groups had the country's lowest rates of access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and electricity. While non-Muslim IPs fare relatively better, their rates of access to basic services fall behind those of non-Muslim/non-IPs ethnic groups. Limited access to basic services, particularly clean water and sanitation, can have adverse consequences, especially among children. A study comparing soil-transmitted helminth (STH) infections between IP and non-IP schoolchildren found that cumulative STH prevalence was significantly higher among IP children. STH infections, when left untreated, can lead to adverse health outcomes, including permanent growth deficits, diarrhea, and iron-deficiency anemia, which can have long-term consequences on children's health and development.

As correctly argued by the World Bank (2024): "Overall, disparities in education, health outcomes, and access to basic services undermine human capital development among IPs, constraining their opportunities to rise above poverty and limiting their potential and prospects for upward mobility."



Conclusion

The data presented above reveal that there is a new type of social pyramid or social hierarchy in the Philippines, wherein at the top of the pyramid are Non-Indigenous Peoples, followed by Indigenous Peoples and the bottom of it are the IPs and Muslim tribes in BARMM. The findings also show the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender and geography-- which means that the poverty situation is influenced or reinforced by location/geography and gender. This will have implications on development planning and practice/interventions.

Recommendations

The Philippine State should:

1. Allocate/mobilize more resources, programs and projects for basic social services in indigenous communities, especially in the BARMM areas;
2. Review the previous administration's (PRRD) action of red-tagging and abolishing all alternative learning systems and "Lumad schools" that are sincerely working for the social uplift of Indigenous Peoples in Mindanao;
3. Support more IP Education programs of the Department of Education and the Schools of Living Traditions (SLTs) of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA);
4. Intensify the primary health care and universal health care programs of the Department of Health (DOH) , particularly in the Geographically Isolated and Disadvantages Areas (GIDAs) where the Indigenous Peoples and Muslim Tribes live;
5. Expand and intensify current state-initiated anti-poverty programs, such as but not limited to, the 4Ps (Conditional Cash Transfer) program, Philhealth, Kala-hi-CIDSS or NCDDP and, most importantly;
6. Facilitate the delineation, titling and registration of Ancestral Domains and Ancestral Lands of Indigenous Peoples (see Policy Brief Number 1).

References Cited

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