

Biodiversity Conservation Practices and Extent of Environmental Stewardship Among Indigenous Peoples in Caraga Region, Mindanao, Philippines

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Abstract : The presence and role of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) residing in key biodiversity, protected, and watershed areas within the ancestral domain in the Caraga region, Mindanao, Philippines, hold immense significance. Recognizing their importance and rights, this study aimed to determine the level of biodiversity conservation practices and extent of environmental stewardship among the Mamanwas, Manobos, and Higaonons, assess potential differences in these practices, and identify factors that facilitate or hinder them. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-method research design, 421 respondents participated through a researcher-made questionnaire. Additional data were collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, researcher field notes, community immersions, and secondary sources. The results revealed a high level of biodiversity conservation practices across the three IP groups, with variations influenced by their cultural and traditional practices, awareness, and access to resources and information. Each group exhibited unique environmental practices shaped by their distinct cultures, traditions, and customary knowledge. They have a strong sense of ownership and responsibility towards their ancestral lands and territories and adopt traditional knowledge and practices that promote sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation. These practices align with the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), also known as Republic Act No. 8371. Various facilitating and hindering factors influenced their conservation efforts. To uphold the region's biodiversity resources, it is recommended that government agencies continue to evaluate and monitor the sustainability of IPs' local biodiversity conservation practices. Additionally, efforts should be made to involve IP communities as essential contributors and stakeholders in these conservation endeavors.

Keywords : biodiversity, conservation, indigenous peoples, traditional knowledge, environmental stewardship

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