

## Article

# Group Cohesion and Deepened Relationship Arising from Unintended Interventions: Impact Assessment on LPU's Partnership with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province

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**Abstract:** In the realm of community interventions and programs, outcomes can be intended but occasionally diverge from their intended goals. This study delves into the unanticipated consequences arising from an enduring ten-year partnership between the Lyceum of the Philippines University-Manila (LPU-MNL) and the indigenous Dumagat community of Cabog, Dingalan, Province of Aurora. Researchers conducted field visits in August 2022 and February 2023, employing interviews, narratives from indigenous community members, documents about the past interventions, and faculty and staff testimonies. Using a data triangulation, the results reveal a strengthened sense of community cohesion and strengthened relationships among the Dumagat people and with their academic partner institution (LPU-MNL). Notably, Jennylyn, a Dumagat individual, ascended to the position of community Chieftain, officially recognized by the state. Additionally, a new-state-sanctioned organization, MAEDUP, was formed, dedicated to preserving indigenous knowledge, skills, and practices while fostering unity within the indigenous community. The intergenerational mapping exercise conducted during the study illuminated the aspirations of the younger generation and their inclination to emulate their predecessors and community members. Consequently, this led to a deeper understanding of community needs, inspiring the formation of a youth group committed to assisting and enhancing their community.

**Keywords:** Cultural renaissance, Decolonization, Indigenous community, Maedup, Trust-building activities

## 1. Introduction

There might be many plans in-place and ways to address social and economic development challenges that might ease the burden of socially excluded groups, needless to say, having cross-cutting ties between groups open up economic opportunities to those belonging to less powerful, vulnerable or excluded groups (Narayan, 1999). The important thing to note however, is to point out the sincerity of a particular formal group, organization, institution or government to change the on-going plight experienced by excluded groups such as the indigenous peoples. They, according to the United Nations, n.d., are usually, if not always, face a denial of their right to control their own development following their own values, needs and priorities, a poor or none at all political representation and a lack of access to social services. Knowing and understanding them, more so when exposed and immersed with them, put weight for a call of addressing THEIR needs, and not the definition of the needs that the “formal group” wants them to be addressed - a structure that is frequently overlooked and that is to observe decolonization and to demonstrate respect to the indigenous knowledge, skills and their practices.

Despite the recognition of the government on the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples rights following the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples), ILO (International Labour Organization), IPRA (Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act) and other notable and landmark laws, many of the indigenous peoples are still deprived economically, socially and politically. The Dumagat people in Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora are not different at all. Formal groups then like academic institutions extend their engagements to assist the indigenous groups. A collaboration between academic institutions and local communities is essential, however, sometimes tricky (Gershon, 2021). Such collaborations have been shown to have a number of advantageous effects, including increased relationships and group cohesion arising from interventions. This study, however, aims to assess the impact of unintended interventions on group cohesion and deepened relationships amongst the Dumagat themselves

and between Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) and the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province grounded in indigenization and decolonization (Alfred, 2009).

This paper makes the supposition that aside from anticipated interventions, unanticipated interventions are inevitable. Like the former, the latter may have a favorable or unfavorable effect on relationships and group cohesion within and in between partnerships of organizations, communities, and academic institutions.

The concept of “unintended interventions” in this paper refers to the unplanned, often subtle outcomes or relational shifts that arise not from explicit project goals but from the sustained presence, actions, and perceptions shaped through long-term academic engagement. These may include changes in trust, cultural visibility, power dynamics, empowerment, or intra-community relationships, both positive and challenging. While not part of formal project frameworks, such effects are crucial in assessing the full impact of institutional presence in Indigenous settings. Yet, scholarly attention to these residual or unintended outcomes remains scarce, particularly in the Philippine context on academic institutions partnership with an Indigenous community.

The urgency of exploring these unintended impacts is underscored by long-standing critiques from indigenous communities themselves. A consolidated report by the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (2019), summarizing over 30 years of engagement in Indigenous peoples’ education, highlights recurring consequences of mainstream interventions. These include the alienation of indigenous youth from their own communities, heritage, culture, and history; the breakdown of intergenerational ties that is manifested in the youth’s disrespect and sometimes blatant disrespect of the elders; graduates or schooled youth, leaving the community because they imbibed the view that working in the ancestral domain is inferior; and individual success and growth of schooled indigenous peoples do not translate into community growth and empowerment.

In contrast, other indigenous communities in the Philippines perceive education as a recent yet transformative phenomenon, viewing it as a tool for empowerment and resistance against exploitation and marginalization. Many indigenous parents express a strong desire for their children to attend school, acquire literacy and numeracy skills to prevent them from being deceived, cheated and ridiculed by non-Indigenous peoples. For example, Agta and Batak parents, consider education vital in breaking the cycle of discrimination and marginalization (Austria-Young & Racelis, 2014).

These contrasting perspectives underscore the importance of assessing not only the formal intentions of academic partnerships but also the their unintended legacies. Doing so is essential for understanding the broader impacts of institutional engagements on Indigenous communities, particularly in ensuring that such partnerships do not inadvertently reproduce the very marginalization they aim to redress.

Researchers grounded their paper on the decolonization theory, which proposes that the process of decolonization is necessary for achieving social justice and empowerment for indigenous peoples. The theory posits that indigenous peoples have been historically marginalized, oppressed, and dispossessed of their lands, cultures, and identities by “colonial powers” named as the “Unat” or “Tagalog”. Decolonization involves the restoration of indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and cultural revitalization, as well as the dismantling of “colonial” structures and attitudes that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. The theory emphasizes the importance of indigenous voices, perspectives, and participation in the process of decolonization, as well as the need for non-Indigenous allies to support and collaborate with indigenous communities in achieving their goals. Decolonization theory has been applied to a wide range of issues affecting Indigenous peoples, including land rights, education, health, governance (Smith, 1999).

In this study, decolonization theory not only framed the researchers’ epistemological stance but also informed their analytical process, particularly its emphasis on relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). Wilson beautifully encapsulates this concept by stating that relationships not only shape Indigenous reality, they are reality. He further explains that indigenous researchers form relationships with ideas as a means of achieving enlightenment within the ceremony that is Indigenous research. This ceremony, according to Wilson, is centered on maintaining accountability to these relationships.

Similarly, the researchers of this study were guided by the notion that Indigenous oral narratives or stories are not merely meant to be recounted and passed down; they also serve as powerful tools for teaching (Archibald, 2008). This underscores the importance of working closely with community elders, often the storytellers alongside the chieftain, who shared life-experience stories, whether personal or traditional. These narratives served as guiding elements in the development of culturally respectful research methods, enabling the researchers to draw from valuable Indigenous knowledge systems. Ultimately this integration of storytelling offered profound insights into the lived realities and wisdom of indigenous communities particularly the Dumagats in Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora.

Anchored in decolonization theory and informed by the principles of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) and storywork (Archibald, 2008), this study employed participatory research techniques to extract culturally grounded and authentic insights. A participatory thematic analysis approach was utilized, wherein emerging themes were co-constructed and validated with Dumagat community members, LPU volunteers, long-standing partners of the community (initiators/champions), and other external partners

to ensure alignment with their lived experiences and cotextual realities. This framework not only shaped the data collection strategies, but also guided the interpretation of relational shifts and community narratives through a culturally respectful lens.

While several studies have examined formal community development programs or outreach initiatives, limited attention has been paid to how long-standing academic partnerships unintentionally influence indigenous social cohesion, especially within Philippine Indigenous contexts such as that of the Dumagat.

Therefore this study specifically aimed to:

1. Identify the unintended results of interventions arising from the engagements through the years with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province;
2. Determine factors that strengthened relationships and group cohesion of both parties;
3. Describe the trust building activities that evolved in the intervention process; and
4. Assess indicators of gains and gaps for both LPU and the Dumagat in reinforcing or diminishing their pursuit of mutual goals.

This study offers insights not only into the dynamics of Indigenous-academic collaboration, but also contributes to the broader discourse decolonizing institutional partnerships. By understanding how unintended interventions affect group cohesion and deepened relationship, the findings may inform more ethical, reflective, and community-responsive practices in higher education engagement.

Conceptual Framework (Figure 1).

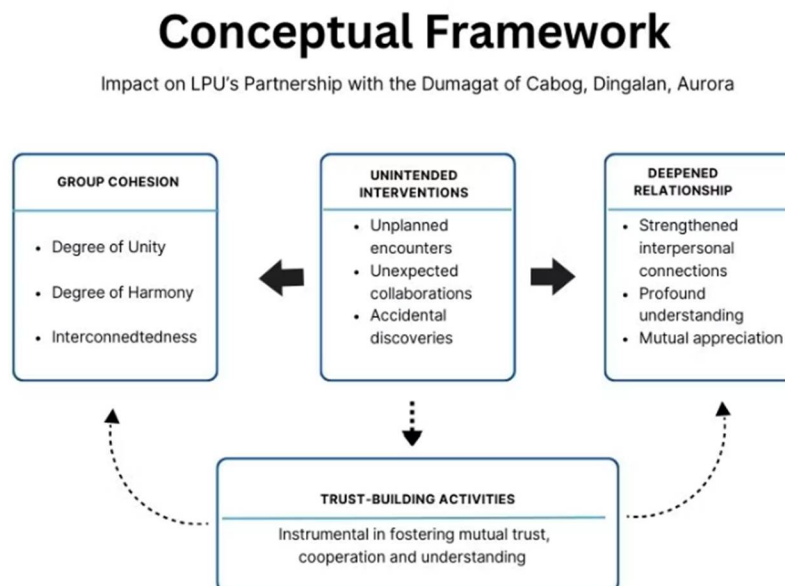


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

The conceptual framework suggests that unintended interventions, as a result of a sustained interactions and engagements initiated by Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora, can create both positive and negative impact on group cohesion and the deepened relationship. The extent of these impacts depends on the nature of the unintended interventions received by the two parties following their own and shared values, needs, and goals to hopefully decolonizing our practice and indigenizing our teaching (Pete et al, 2013).

The trust-building activities, as the intervening or mediating variable, plays a crucial role in shaping the results of unintended interventions. Positive and well-received trust-building activities can enhance the positive impact on group cohesion and deepened relationships, mitigating any potential negative consequences. Guided with the concepts of indigenization and decolonization, obtaining data using the identified approaches in this study must be carefully administered, evaluated, and analyzed.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study adopts a participatory research design grounded in decolonization theory, with the aim of centering the voices and perspectives of the Dumagat community, as well as those of long-standing institutional partners who have consistently

provided assistance and guidance to the community. Data wDurkheimere gathered through a combination of field observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal community dialogues conducted over multiple site visits. In addition, document analysis was employed to trace the historical development of the partnership between the Dumagat community and the institution (LPU). This multimodal approach allowed for a richer understanding not only of the impact of LPU's partnership with the Dumagat community, but also of the lived experiences of community members and the evolution of institutional engagement.

Interviews, focus group discussions and community dialogues were conducted both jointly and at separate periods, providing the researchers with greater flexibility to engage a broader range of community members and other relevant participants. To supplement the aforementioned methods, the study employed non-participant field observations as part of the participatory research strategy. Observations were systematically conducted during informal interactions, collaborative activities, and community events involving both Dumagat community members and LPU volunteers. The goal was to capture authentic relational dynamics, behavioral patterns, and context-specific that may not have surfaced in interviews and dialogues. Following the guidance of field notes (Emerson et al., 2011), the researchers maintained two types of field notes: descriptive notes and reflective or analytical notes. Descriptive notes were taken in real time or immediately after each activity, capturing specific interactions and observed activities such as shared meals, informal interactions and dialogues, house visitations among others, as well as non-verbal behaviors, including expressions of trust, hesitation, and body language. On the other hand, reflective or analytical notes were written on the same day and aimed to expand on the descriptive observations. After completing their assigned observations, the researchers convened to report and discuss their objective descriptions and reflective insights. These collaborative sessions included the identification of initial interpretations and observed patters in the field, as well as the articulation of emerging questions and thematic connections to decolonization theory. At the end of the day, the researchers acknowledged their position as outsiders to the Dumagat community and remained critically reflexive throughout the process by continuously examining how their institutional roles, cultural backgrounds, and intentions could influence data interpretation. Reflexive journaling and dialogical engagement with community members were employed to ensure accountability and manage potential research bias.

It is worth noting that the overall schedule was constrained by several logistical challenges, including the geographical remoteness of the research site, budgetary limitations, and the limited availability of personnel to accompany the researchers during their visits. These constraints significantly reduced the frequent and duration of field engagements, thereby requiring the research team to optimize each visit for both data collection and community consultation.

The selection of participants was purposive, focusing on Dumagat elders, youth, key community members, long-standing-partners involved in the community, as well as LPU volunteers and external collaborators who have continuously guided the community. To ensure ethical compliance, the research was conducted under a long-standing agreement between the community and the institution, wherein researchers are permitted to explore and engage with the community only after prior communication and approval. Aside from obtaining the approval of the community's chieftain and the heads of the institution concerning the engagements and the Dumagat community projects, the researchers also secured the individual consent of community members prior to conducting interviews and focus group discussions. All participants were provided with informed consent, and the research process was clearly explained in Filipino, and when necessary, through Dumagat interpreters fluent in Filipino and the local dialect. Throughout the study, cultural protocols were strictly observed. Importantly, community members were not merely treated as informants but as active collaborators in the co-interpretation of findings. Emerging themes were shared and validated through feedback or dialogical sessions held with community members, LPU stakeholders, and peer researchers, ensuring participatory reflection and cultural alignment.

The study is restricted to evaluating how unintentional interventions affect relationships and group cohesion between LPU and the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province. Potential biases in the data collection process and the study's restricted scope to Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province (the specific area under study), and LPU as the academic institution are some of the study's weaknesses. To manage the biases, scope, concepts, methods and contexts are carefully evaluated and validated. Notably, one major limitation of the study was the budget constraint, which prevented additional site visits that could have yielded more comprehensive data on the development of group cohesion and the strengthening of relationships between the community and the institution particularly those arising from unintended interventions.

### *2.1. Research Participants*

A study on "Group cohesion and deepened relationships arising from unintended interventions: Impact assessment on LPU's partnership with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province" include members of the Dumagat community in Sitio Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora and LPU stakeholders who are involved in the partnership as research participants. These individuals were interviewed and observed in order to learn more about perception and experiences with group cohesion and relationship building arising from unintended interventions as an impact of the partnership. It is also feasible to involve other relevant stakeholders as study

participants, such as members of local government and community leaders as research participants. It is essential to ensure that research participants are given adequate information about the goals and methods of the study, and that their involvement is informed and voluntary.

## 2.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Members of the Dumagat community who are involved in or have been impacted by the partnership with LPU;
- LPU representatives whether teaching and non-teaching personnel who are involved in the partnership with the Dumagat community;
- Individuals who are able and willing to provide informed consent to participate in the study to be used for data collection (former Brgy. Captain of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora, DepEd teachers and NCIP representative); and
- Individuals who have been involved in the partnership for at least a decade (2012- 2023) to ensure they have sufficient experience to provide relevant insights.

The following are some of the methods utilized by the researchers for gathering data on the topic of "Group cohesion and deepened relationships arising from unintended interventions: Impact assessment on LPU's partnership with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province."

**Interviews.** Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including members of the Dumagat community, LPU representatives (then and now), and other relevant individuals. These interviews were designed to elicit insights on group cohesion, relationship building, and the perceived impact of LPU's long-term partnership with the community. Notably, interviews often took the form of oral narratives or storytelling, reflecting Indigenous modes of knowledge-sharing. This approach enriched the data collection process, yielding contextually grounded and culturally resonant insights.

**Focus groups.** Focus groups are a method of qualitative study that entails assembling a small group of people to have discussions about a certain subject. It is utilized to learn more in-depth details about the Dumagat community's group cohesion and relationship building among members, and their perceptions on the impact of LPU's partnership. This was used for triangulation purposes.

**Observations.** Observations were carried out over a period of six days (three consecutive days in August 2022 and another three consecutive days in February of 2023) in Brgy. Cabog, Dingalan Aurora. These non-participant field observation sessions aimed to document the interactions between members of the Dumagat community and LPU stakeholders, with a focus on examining group cohesion and relationship-building at a personal level. While additional observational visits were initially planned to further enrich the data, these were ultimately constrained due to budget limitations on the part of the institution and limited availability of personnel to accompany the researchers in the research site.

**Document analysis.** Documents such as activity and accomplishment reports, and other relevant materials were analyzed to gather information about the impact of LPU's partnership on the Dumagat community, as well as traced the historical data on interactions and engagements as interventions to build group cohesion and relationships unintentionally.

The study was restricted to evaluating how unintentional interventions have affected relationships and group cohesion between LPU and the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora Province. One of the study's key limitations lies in its restricted geographical scope (mountainous and seaside areas of Brgy. Cabog), focusing solely on this specific locality and a single academic institution. Additionally, potential biases in the data collection process present another methodological constraint because of the limited visits provided to the researchers. To address these limitations, the researchers employed a systematic approach by carefully evaluating and validating the study's scope, conceptual framework, methods, and contextual relevance, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The study employed an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that was grounded in decolonization theory and shaped by the principles of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) and Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008). The analysis was designed to prioritize the integrity of indigenous knowledge systems, skills, and practices by treating narratives and community-shared stories as legitimate sources of knowledge and analytical insight, alongside with the insights shared by other relevant participants.

Data were gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, dialogical validation sessions, field observation, and document analysis. Verbatim transcriptions were created for all audio-recorded data, and descriptive and reflective field notes were written based on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) two-stage method. Indigenous oral narratives shared by elders and key informants during interviews and informal gatherings were preserved in their narrative form and annotated for recurring relational patterns, symbols, and values conveyed through story. Supplementary documents such as accomplishment reports, annual reports,

and other relevant documents from the institution's center of engagement were used to triangulate findings and identify unrecorded dynamics of the engagement.

Following the transcription process based on the audio interview conducted, the researchers proceeded with data analysis and interpretation. This process involved several key stages: verification (including data cleaning and removal of "noise"), data organization, data reduction, data analysis grounded on thematic analysis for theme development, interpretation, validation, and reliability checks, all leading toward the drafting of the manuscript for peer review. These steps were conducted both collaboratively and independently by the researchers with support from a transcriber to ensure accuracy and efficiency in the processing of qualitative data.

Coding was conducted inductively using grounded thematic analysis consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, adapted within a decolonial and participatory lens, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. After transcribing field notes and interview responses, initial codes were generated based on recurring patterns in the participants' narratives. These groups were iteratively grouped into broader themes such as: Confidence Building ensues from constant relevant dialogues because of sustained visit; Cultural renaissance stems from cultural discussions; Collective consciousness balances the rise of individualism; and Post-COVID support from other partners augments local initiatives. To highlight the rigor of theme development, the themes were derived from the recurring frequency of participants responses, allowing patterns and relationships to naturally emerge from the data. Based on these patterns, the researchers systematically developed the themes and subsequently shared them with the chieftain and other elders for community member-checking to ensure cultural accuracy and contextual relevance. Additionally, the themes were presented to institutional heads to validate both the process and outcomes of theme development, ensuring the interpretations remained grounded in the lived experiences of the Dumagat community and consistent with the ethical and collaborative framework of the study.

To ensure cultural alignment and contextual relevance, the emergent themes were validated through dialogic sessions with key community representatives, including the chieftain and leaders of long-standing institutional partners who have been guiding the community for over a decade. Additional validation was carried out with both the community members themselves and external partners who have been consistently serving the Dumagat community. These validation processes were implemented after the application of various participatory research techniques, reinforcing the study's commitment to collaborative and culturally responsive inquiry. This participatory step allowed the community primarily and other partners to affirm, challenge, or reframe emerging interpretations. The co-construction of meaning in this process served not only as a methodological step but as an ethical imperative aligned with decolonization principles. Notably, throughout the analysis process, the researchers, in line with relational accountability, continuously reflected on their roles, relationships, and interpretations. They maintained reflective journals to track their own positionalities, emotions, and biases. This practice was crucial to maintaining decolonial integrity and honoring Indigenous epistemologies by avoiding extractive tendencies. Additionally, to uphold ethical standards, informed consent was provided to all participants, with the research process thoroughly explained in Filipino, and when needed, with the help of Dumagat interpreters fluent in both Filipino and the local dialect. Importantly, the research was carried out in accordance with a long-established agreement between the institution and the community, which stipulates that any engagement or exploration by researchers must first undergo proper communication and approval. In addition to securing the endorsement of both the community's chieftain and institutional leaders regarding activities and projects involving the Dumagat community, the researchers also obtained individual consent from community members before conducting interviews and focus group discussions. Youth participants and their parents were informed in advance about the nature and purpose of these activities, ensuring transparency and adherence to ethical research standards throughout the data collection process.

#### *2.4. Data Collection Guideline*

This tool or guideline was utilized for data collection (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Guideline or Tool Used in Data Collection.

Objectives	Guide questions based on unintended results of interventions			
	Dumagat members	LPU Volunteers	Initiators/Champions	Remarks
1. Identify unintended results of interventions arising from the engagements through the years with the Dumagat of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora	<p>What interventions were not intended by LPU but which occurred during the intervention process or as a result of the intervention process?</p> <p>Who benefited from these unintended interventions?</p>	<p>What forms of support have you received from other groups, agencies, LGUs during the intervention process?</p>	<p>How did you get involved in the unintended interventions?</p> <p>What was your contribution?</p>	<p>These can be individuals, couples, families. They could also belong to different levels:</p>
2. Determine factors that strengthened relationships and group cohesion of both parties	<p>What factors from these unintended interventions contribute to strengthen the relationships among you as Dumagat members? And between you and LPU?</p> <p>In both levels, have they made you closer or more distant from each other? In what way(s)?</p> <p>(same questions will be asked from KIIs)</p>	<p>How did you coordinate with various groups to assist you in enhancing group cohesion and relationship with others?</p> <p>What were the particular contributions of these outside groups?</p>	<p>How did you get involved to strengthen relationship and group cohesion?</p> <p>What was your contribution?</p>	<p>These can be individuals, couples, families. They could also belong to different levels e.g. single mothers, high school graduates, fisherfolk,</p>
3. Describe trust-building activities that evolved in the intervention processes.	<p>How did the unintended interventions arise from the planned activities that were voluntarily shared by you because you trusted the LPU team?</p> <p>What prompted you to trust the LPU team?</p>	<p>What forms of support have you received from other groups, agencies, LGUs during the intervention process?</p>	<p>What activities do you think added to displaying your trust on LPU even if they may have been rarely visiting because of some valid reasons? (COVID for example)</p> <p>What was your contribution in building trust with LPU and the community?</p>	<p>Identify leaders who made these activities possible.</p>
4. Assess indicators of gains and gaps for both LPU and the Dumagat in reinforcing or diminishing their pursuit of mutual goals	<p>What indicators express gains that both partners obtained from the unintended interventions? What indicators express the gaps from the unintended interventions?</p>	<p>How did they contribute to the gains and gaps?</p>	<p>How did you involve yourselves in the gains achieved by the. Community?</p> <p>What can you recommend to fill up the gaps obtaining from these endeavors?</p>	<p>Same as 1 &amp; 2 above</p>

To gather culturally grounded and context-specific data, the study utilized a structured Data Collection Guideline designed to align with the research objectives and participatory framework. This tool consisted of four key thematic objectives corresponding to the major goals of the study: (1) identifying unintended results of interventions, (2) determining factors that strengthened group cohesion, (3) describing-trust building activities, and (4) assessing indicators of gains and gaps in the partnership between LPU and

the Dumagot of Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora. The guideline provided tailored guide questions for three groups of key informants namely Dumagat community members (primarily the elders, youth and the Chieftain), LPU volunteers, and initiators or champions of the engagement (institutional heads concerning engagement and external partners).

Each objective was accompanied by context-specific questions aimed at drawing out reflective narratives, lived experiences, and perceived relational impacts. For instance, Dumagat members were asked how unintended interventions emerged and who benefitted from these unintended interventions; LPU volunteers were asked how they coordinated with external groups and what forms of support they have received from them; and initiators or champions reflected on their role in enabling or shaping the outcomes.

Furthermore, questions were designed to prompt participants to reflect on specific groups within the Dumagat community (including but not limited to elders, youth, single mothers, fisherfolk) and multi-level interactions (including interviews, focus groups, and dialogical sessions), capturing both personal and collective effects. Additionally, by adding comments or notes freely, the researchers captured unanticipated themes and follow up more deeply on them if they turned out to be important.

This participatory tool was instrumental in uncovering nuanced relational shifts and community perspectives, validating the relevance of unintended interventions in shaping group cohesion, as well as deepened relationship, and the trajectory of the partnership.

### 3. Results and Discussion

“A human is human because of other humans” (African Proverb) beautifully encapsulates the soul of this paper. This research explores into the transformative power of human connections and collaborations, emphasizing how meaningful the partnerships between communities or organizations that can enhance the shared human experience. It acknowledges that the interconnectedness between humans plays a vital role in shaping individual identities and community dynamics, centering on the significance of collective efforts in fostering positive change and transformation. This study serves as a testament to the idea that a human’s humanity is enriched and defined through the meaningful interactions and connections they share with others, as exemplified by the collaborative journey of LPU as an academic institution and the Dumagat community, considered a less powerful, vulnerable and excluded group.

As follows are the themes that were developed following the research objectives: Theme No. 1. Confidence Building ensues from constant relevant dialogues because of sustained visit (Table 2).

**Table 2.** On Partnership’s Confidence Building as Theme No. 1.

Dumagat Community	LPU Volunteers
Facing the dominant; speaking up to the Tagalogs “Dati nahihya kaming makipag-usap sa mga unat, ngayon hindi na” (Before we used to be sy to talk to non-Indigenous people, but not anymore.)	Self-reflection on respect and admiration of cultural diversity “Ang dami ko palang ginagawa o sinasabi dati na mali at tagged to be cultural appropriation.” (I realized that many of the things I used to do or say were wrong and considered cultural appropriation.)
“Nung dumating po ‘yong LPU, mas madalas na po ang pagpunta ng mga taga-ibang lugar. Naging open po kami sa kanila.” (When LPU arrived, there were more frequent visits from outsiders, and we became open to them.)	“Mas naiintindihan ko na sila.” (I understand them better now.)
This was observed during one of the dialogical sessions, one community member (seconded by many) exclaimed when asked the importance of sustained partnership of LPU and the community: “Kaya na naming makipag-usap sa mga Unat.” (We are now confident in communication with non-indigenous individuals.)	
Younger generation attendance in different trainings for development and empowerment (like Mariel and Aleli)	
MSKK (Malayang Samahan ng Kabataang Katutubo) was also launched and organized by the younger generation because of exposure to interactions and engagements of LPU and their parents Younger Generation:	Interest in IPEd (Indigenous Peoples Education) “Ang sarap ng pag-aralang ng mga katutubo, lalo itong mga Dumagat.” (It’s truly fulfilling to study about indigenous peoples, especially the Dumagat.)
On their initiative to ask for budget at National Youth Commission thru their Barangay SK -	
“Ano po dahil din po sa nakikita din po namin na kakulangan. Kaya	

po kami nagkakaroon po ng lakas ng loob para mag-request.” (It is also because we see the lack of shortcomings ourselves, which gives us the courage to make requests.)

Registration of MAEDUP by themselves – this was not really intended- LPU only focused on education. With a little encouragement from LPU, the Dumagat community organized and registered MAEDUP (means Mabuhay in Dumaget language) as a legitimate group acknowledged by the government  
 “Dahil po sa MAEDUP, kami po ay parang natutong tumayo sa sariling paa” (Because of MAEDUP, we have somehow learned to stand on our own feet.)

Learning about the importance of community organizing.  
 “It’s good thing our organizing committee goes well, even if there are occasional “sablay” (slip-ups or casual mistakes), at least we always find ways to address them.”

Manifestations of asserting their rights when confronted by the buyers of their land. These were manifested how Jennilyn, the chieftain of the community, and members fought for their community.

Learning about IP Rights  
 Seminar-workshops were organized on IP rights initiated by LPU volunteers.

The Dumagat community’s interaction with the Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU) volunteers has significantly transformed their self-perceptions and community dynamics. Historically withdrawn from engaging with dominant groups such as the Tagalogs (collectively known as the Unat by the indigenous community), the Dumagat people, especially the younger generation, now speak with newfound confidence. Notably, the repeated quotes such as: “Kaya na naming makipag-usap sa mga Unat” and “Dati nahihya kaming makipag-usap sa mga unat, ngayon hindi na.” are not just signs of confidence. They reflect a dismantling of colonial linguistic and social barriers. Meaning, the Dumagot people are overcoming historical power imbalances by reclaiming their voice (Smith, 1999), where colonial systems once forced them to hide their identify (shame when speaking to outsiders); submit to external authority (linguistic or cultural assimilation); and accept inferior status (social hierarchies) but they now engage non-indigenous people or the “Unat” without self-censorship (speaking in their own terms); without shame (rejecting imposed inferiority); and as equals (dismantling colonial-era social barriers). This represents a power reversal, from enforced silence to assertive dialogue, which actively deconstructs colonial legacies of disempowerment. Furthermore, this is what Shawn Wilson (2008) refers to as “relational accountability”, where knowledge is not merely transferred but grown through relationships that honor mutual recognition. This shift is largely attributed to self-reflection fostered through the LPU’s respect and admiration for cultural diversity, hence the sustained dialogue and visits to the Dumagat community.

These engagements in various development and empowerment activities and projects has also played a crucial role. For instance, individuals like Mariel and Aleli exemplify the positive impact of these educational and communal initiatives. The formation of MSKK (Malayang Samahan ng Kabataang Katutubo) highlights the younger generation’s proactive stance, inspired by the interactions facilitated by LPU and their parents. This is evident in their assertive steps to request budgets from the National Youth Commission through their Barangay SK, addressing perceived shortcomings. Additionally, because of the community’s continuous show of commitments, interactions, and engagements with LPU, it has led them to the registration of MAEDUP (Mabuhay in Dumaget language), a government-acknowledged group, which underscores the community’s growing organizational capabilities. The statement, “Dahil po sa MAEDUP, kami po ay parang natutong tumayo sa sariling paa” (“Because of MAEDUP, we have learned to stand on our own feet”), encapsulates their journey towards self-reliance. In the two (2) immersion dates that the researchers stayed with the community, this type of statement is not mentioned once but many from different generations and genders. This newfound empowerment is further demonstrated by the community’s assertiveness in defending their land rights against external buyers, led by figures like Jennilyn the chieftain. Admitting and confirming by the community members that the degree of unity, harmony and interconnectedness as well as strengthened interpersonal connections, understanding and mutual appreciation can be clearly manifested to be improved.

Theories on community empowerment and participatory development, such as those proposed by Robert Chambers, support these findings. Chambers emphasizes the importance of involving marginalized communities in the decision-making process, fostering a sense of ownership and self-efficacy that leads to sustainable development. He also argued that communities as such are excluded in all spectrums, and found normally at the bottom among political, economic and social positions. (Chambers, 1983).

LPU volunteers’ involvement in the Dumagat Community has been a profound journey of mutual growth and learning as well. For volunteers, the experience significantly bolstered their confidence and cultural sensitivity, driven by consistent and meaningful dialogue during sustained visits to the community. This continuous interaction has facilitated deep self-reflection regarding the importance of respecting and admiring cultural diversity. The volunteers’ engagement with the community and its KSP (Knowledge, Skills and Practices) has sparked a genuine interest and understanding of its significance. This exposure has not only broadened

their educational perspectives but also underscored the vital role of community organizing and the assertion of indigenous peoples' rights. By witnessing and participating in the partnership, the LPU volunteers have gained valuable insights into the importance of these elements in fostering sustainable development and community empowerment. Their exposure to the community also paved the way for the organization of seminar-workshops on Indigenous Peoples' rights within the institution, initiated by LPU volunteers.

Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000) supports these observations, emphasizing the transformative power of education through dialogue and mutual respect, leading to the empowerment of both the educators and the educated because of the sustained interaction and partnership of the institution and the community. Theme No. 2. Cultural renaissance stems from cultural discussions (Table 3).

**Table 3.** On Partnership's Cultural Renaissance as Theme No. 2.

Dumagat Community	LPU Volunteers
<p>Indigeneity expressed in Intergenerational cultural mapping conducted during trainings heighten Dumagats realization of the importance of their culture.</p> <p>Here, it unveils the aspirations of younger generation to be custodian of the environment while preserving their culture and aspiring to finish their studies to be of help in their family and the community as a whole.</p> <p>"Kelangan lang i-break ang cycle" (The cycle just needs to be broken), says the Dumagat who recently graduated a Theology program in one of the colleges in Silang, Cavite, Philippines.</p>	<p>Reflected about the different generational needs of the Dumagat community. The older generation is focused on livelihood and the present while younger generation focuses on the gift of the future thru education.</p>
<p>Importance of their cultural values expressed in the making of the Mog-ot story series to which they contributed</p> <p>"Ngayon po kasi natututo na rin 'yong mga bata kung paano ang tamang pag-gamit ng katutubong salita." (These days, the children are also learning how to properly use the indigenous language.)</p> <p>"Pinag-uusapan na naming ulit ang tungkol sa paniniwala lalo na tuwing may bisita."</p> <p>(We have once again strengthened our beliefs, especially whenever there are visitors.)</p> <p>This sentiment was also noted during the non-participant field observation)</p>	<p>Developed a Mog-ot story series dedicated and shared to the Dumagat to promote and preserve their Dumaget language</p>

The Dumagat community's understanding of the value of their cultural legacy has grown dramatically as a result of their participation in intergenerational cultural mapping during training sessions. This activity has revealed the younger generation's aspirations to help their families and communities, in addition to their desires to be stewards of the environment. The powerful phrase "Kelangan lang i-break ang cycle" expressed by a Dumagat graduate of Theology program in Silang, Cavite highlights the community's desire to overcome historical limitations through cultural preservation and education. The Mog-ot story series which was created with contributions from the Dumagat community, is an example of it exemplifies the value placed on their cultural narratives. This initiative demonstrates their dedication to preserving and honoring their cultural heritage; a concrete manifestation of their cultural renaissance. Additionally, participants' statements proved that there is hope in the revival of their native language and traditions even if it is reemerging slowly summed in these quotes: "Ngayon po kasi natututo na rin 'yong mga bata kung paano ang tamang pag-gamit ng katutubong salita" and Pinag-uusapan na naming ulit ang tungkol sa paniniwala, lalo na tuwing may bisita.". However, these cultural discussions appear to be in place or reactive to external presence,

The participation of LPU volunteers in the Dumagat community has fostered a cultural renaissance marked by insightful reflections on the distinct generational needs within the community. Through their engagements, the volunteers observed that the older generation prioritizes livelihood and immediate concerns, while younger generation aspires towards future-oriented goals, particularly through education. This understanding has prompted the volunteers to tailor their efforts to address these varying needs effectively. One significant outcome of this interaction is the development of the Mog-ot story series. This notable initiative to which the community plays a huge contribution on its creation and consequently was dedicated and shared with the Dumagat community. This masterpiece aims to promote and preserve the Dumagat language, playing a crucial role for cultural preservation. The project with LPU volunteers, also as developers, reflects their commitment to respecting and valuing the Dumagat heritage while supporting educational endeavors that empower the younger generation. Theme no. 3 Collective consciousness balances the rise of individualism(Table 4).

**Table 4.** On Partnership’s Collective Consciousness Balancing the Rise of Individualism as Theme No. 3.

<b>Dumagat Community</b>	<b>LPU Volunteers</b>
How the community rallied behind Jennilyn so she won as their chieftain. She was able to influence her trusted fellow Dumagat to become officers	With shared values, need and goals, everyone is teaming up to endeavor a cause.
Distribution of “ayuda”- they included other Dumagat in the area to be part of the distribution	LPU volunteers saw the importance of faculty & staff working together regardless of unit to arrive at worthwhile activities done in
“Kahit hiwa-hiwalay ang pamilya, nagtutulungan pa rin kami sa mga gawain” (Even though our families are separated, we still help each other with the tasks.)	Even though individual volunteers change, there was always a group of LPU volunteers ready to step in and support the Dumagat community whenever the institutional center for engagement needs assistance.
“Kanya-kanya na po kasi ang hanapbuhay, pero bumabalik pa rin sa komunidad tuwing may kailangan” (Everyone now has their own means of livelihood, but they still return to the community whenever there’s a need.)	“Mahirap mawalay ng ilang araw sa pamilya pero kakayanin. Ang katumabas naman nito ay kaligayahan dahil nakatulong ka sa mga katutubo.” (It’s difficult to be away from family for several days, but it’s bearable. In return, there’s a deep sense of joy from being able to help the indigenous community.)

The collective consciousness that exists within the Dumagat community, especially in the political and social spheres has played a pivotal role in counteracting the growth of individuality. This dynamic was evident when the community rallied behind Jennilyn, ultimately leading to her election as their chieftain. Jennilyn’s leadership was marked by her ability to mobilize and influence trusted fellow Dumagat to take on officer roles, thereby strengthening the community’s governance structure through a shared sense of purpose and collective effort for a common goal.

A noteworthy example if this collective consciousness is the inclusive distribution of “ayuda” (assistance) to the indigenous community. Instead of limiting the distribution to a small group of people, Jennilyn and her team ensured that other Dumagat in the area were included, reinforcing the values of community solidarity and mutual support. This effort demonstrates the community’s commitment to making sure that the good of the whole is prioritized over the interests of a single individual. Furthermore, despite increasing individual pursuits, community members still return to support one another when needed as manifested more candidly in this quote: “Kanya-kanya na po kasi ang hanapbuhay, pero bumabalik pa rin sa komunidad tuwing may kailangan.”

The involvement of LPU volunteers (even though the individuals volunteering may differ from occasion to occasion) in community projects, on the other hand, highlights also the significant role of collective consciousness in balancing the rise of individualism. Motivated by shared values, needs and objectives, the volunteers have exhibited a cohesive strategy in addressing the Dumagat community challenges. The collective effort is clearly evident when faculty and staff from various units within LPU collaborate seamlessly to create and implement relevant activities and initiatives for the Dumagat community such as crop planting, hog raising, trainings, adult literacy, scholarships, livelihood and feeding programs and other material provisions. The observations obtained by the volunteers underscore how crucial cooperation and mutual support are to accomplishing shared goals. This collective consciousness from the volunteers’ sense of togetherness and shared purpose enhances the effectiveness of their actions. Therefore, this partnership is essential for ensuring that any initiatives that are implemented create an influence and benefit the community as a whole. Notably, as one LPU volunteer exclaimed beautifully: “Mahirap mawalay ng ilang araw sa pamilya pero kakayanin. Ang katumabas naman nito ay kaligayahan dahil nakatulong ka sa mga katutubo.” (It’s difficult to be away from family for several days, but it’s bearable. In return, there’s a deep sense of joy from being able to help the indigenous community.)

These observations in both the Dumagat community and LPU volunteers are supported by Emile Durkheim’s concept of communal or collective consciousness written in his book “The division of labor in society”. According to Durkheim, the shared beliefs and moral attitudes within a community create social cohesion and a sense of belonging (Durkheim, 1997). The overall well-being of the community depends on unity and cooperation, which are fostered by this collective consciousness. Additionally, Robert Putnam (2000) on his study of “social capital” in his book “Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community” emphasizes the importance of networks and relationships among people who live and work in a given society, enabling the effective functioning of that society. These aforementioned theories support the positive impact of a strong collective consciousness in balancing individualism and fostering community resilience. Theme No. 4 Post - COVID support from other partners augments local initiatives (Table 5).

**Table 5.** On Post-COVID support to the Dumagat Community as Theme No. 4.

Dumagat Community	LPU Volunteers
Sought NCIP support regarding their land loss	Interest on ancestral domain To interview Key Informants: Alumni, students, DepEd teachers, Non Dumagat neighbors
Since the group is registered and recognized, government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) like Tzu Chi Philippines has provided the Dumagat community a cash donation when a strong typhoon struck Aurora in 2022.	
“Yong barangay po ang tumulong sa amin noon pandemic, tapos sunod ‘yong LPU.” (It was the barangay that helped us during pandemic, then LPU came next.)	Continuous monitoring of the Dumagat community specially in times of disasters.
“Nagbigay ang Tzu Chi Philippines ng pera para sa mga nasalanta ng bagyo” (Tzu Chi Philippines provided financial assistance to those affected by the typhoon.”	Interest on disaster preparedness and risk reduction management.
“Nagbigay po sila ng mga gamit sa eskwela kahit hindi kami nakakahingi.” (They gave us school supplies even without us having to ask) “Sila” or they refers to external partners aside from LPU who provided assistance to the community.	

The Dumagat community’s local activities have been considerably improved by the post -COVID support from external partners on issues of land loss and recent intense storms. This support has strengthened the community’s efforts to address long-standing concerns and provided necessary assistance in times of need. Leveraging its status as a registered and recognized group, the Dumagat community applied for support from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to address their land loss. This official recognition has not only legitimized their claims but also facilitated partnerships with various organizations both government and non-government organizations. One remarkable case is the assistance given to the Dumagat community by Tzu Chi Philippines, a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) after a strong typhoon struck Aurora in 2022. This external support has been instrumental in enabling the community to recover from the disaster and continue their local initiatives as discussed similarly by the study of Fran H. Norris, et al. (2008) on their research about “Community resilience as a metaphor theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness”. The support from external partners in the post-COVID has consequently enhanced the local initiatives because of the sustained partnership of the Dumagat community and LPU that paved away the government recognition and legitimacy of this group to open better opportunities for external support. In acknowledging the need of the community on their ancestral domain interest and the retrieval of their loss of lands, LPU volunteers have conducted a series of key informant interviews involving alumni, students, Department of Education (DepEd) teachers, and non-Dumagat neighbors to gather diverse perspectives and insights that can inform strategies to support the Dumagat’s claims and rights over their ancestral lands. Another focus of the LPU volunteers in their efforts to help the Dumagat community is to continuously monitor Dumagat community in times of disasters, hence their interest on disaster preparedness and risk reduction management.

As mentioned in the prior sections, the researchers conducted two community visits, each lasting three consecutive days. During these visits, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations were employed to gather data. Before departing the research site, dialogical sessions were held as a form of validation and member-checking, allowing participants to reflect on and confirm the accuracy of their responses. Additional meetings were conducted with the chieftain and other relevant individuals to obtain feedback on the preliminary findings and ensure community voices were meaningfully represented in the data interpretation process. Despite these efforts, the fieldwork was constrained by budget limitations, which prevented the researchers from conducting additional visits that could have yielded more nuanced and longitudinal insights. This limitation was further exacerbated by the unavailability of personnel to accompany the researchers and the exhaustion of insitutional research funds allocated for the project. Consequently, the study relied exclusively on the data collected during the two site vists. These constraints limited the researchers’ ability to capture a wider range of perspectives and assess possible shifts over time in the partnership’s impact.

This limitation is further complicated by the lack of “critical” responses from participants or was it really the case? The researchers observed that community members who participated in the study, including the chieftain, did not express any negative sentiments regarding their partnership with LPU. The researchers’ repeated attempts to elicit “negative” experiences were met with silence or deflection as illustrated by responses such as: “Wala naman kaming nakitang hindi maganda” (We didn’t see anything wrong) and “Haka-haka lang” (That’s just a rumor or assumption). This reluctance to criticize could reflect genuine satisfaction with the trust-buiding efforts of the partnership; or a fear of jeopardizing future support. Or could their silence be read as data?

Either of these, it complicates claims of full transparency. As Wilson (2008) argues, true relational accountability requires space for dissent, not just affirmation. If the community feels compelled to perform gratitude, then the partnership remain hierarchical, regardless of good intentions. The researchers however agreed that absence of “critical” responses from participants should not be interpreted as complete satisfaction. Rather, it calls for a more nuanced reading silence as data.

Given these methodological and ethical complexities, future researchers are encouraged to conduct more extensive and prolonged field engagements, which would allow for deeper relationship-building, richer data collection, and more critically informed reflections on the unintended impacts of academic partnerships with indigenous communities such as the Dumagats in Brgy. Cabog, Dingalan, Aurora.

#### 4. Conclusions

The following are the notable points derived from this study:

1. The findings suggest that what initially appear as “confidence building” through sustained dialogue and visits is actually indicative of a deeper reconfiguration of voice and power within the Dumagat-LPU partnership. Those repeated expressions of confidence by the community members should not be read merely as improved interpersonal comfort. Instead, it reflects an evolving linguistic and political subjectivity; a dismantling of colonial linguistic and social barriers, where the community begins to assert itself in dominant discourses from which it had long been marginalized. This shift aligns with what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes as the reclaiming voice in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, where the act of speaking becomes political. Reclaiming voice is the process by which Indigenous people assert their narratives, epistemologies, and ways of knowing, not just in opposition to dominant discourses, but as legitimate and sovereign sources of knowledge (Smith, 1999). The willingness to speak with outsiders like the National Youth Commission; organize autonomous groups like MAEDUP; and navigate institutional systems reflects not passive participation but an evolving assertion of voice, identity, and self-determination. These outcomes confirm that long-term and respectful dialogue that is grounded in relational accountability and cultural humility is capable of reinforcing Indigenous resurgence and foster co-learning environments that challenge institutional dominance. Therefore, the unintended interventions in this partnership offer insight into how decolonial practice, when automatically sustained, becomes a process not of rescuing but of rebalancing power and enhancing community-led transformation.
2. The cultural discussions facilitated between the Dumagat community and LPU did more than revive tradition but in actuality they activated a cultural renaissance rooted in dialogue, reflection, and intergenerational storytelling. As discussed in the work of Archibald’s (2008) storywork, storytelling is not just about remembering the past but shaping the future through relational meaning-making. The creation of the Mog-ot story series, the children’s renewed engagement with their language, and the youth’s aspirations to pursue education reflect a growing collective consciousness and cultural agency (taking ownership of one’s culture). These are not accidental outcomes but signs of an emerging Indigenous future authored from within. What initially perceived as a simple revival of belief and language is, in truth, a quiet assertion of identity and continuity. Through these engagements, cultural revitalization was not imposed but it was awakened, making visible a deeper narrative of empowerment through shared story and purpose.
3. While modernity tends to celebrate individual pursuits, the Dumagat community continues to anchor itself in collective will, whether in electing a chieftain, redistributing aid inclusively, or returning to the community during times of need. Such practices echo Durkheim’s (1997) concept of collective consciousness as a moral glue, but in this Indigenous context, they also embody decolonial resistance to fragmentation. The persistence of shared responsibility among LPU volunteers and the rotating yet consistent support from the academic institution reflects what Smith (1999) and Alfred (2009) describe as a “re-centering of relationality” in Indigenous resurgence or reawakening. This is not simply civic duty but an epistemic stance where individual action is embedded within kinship, community, and cultural responsibility. These findings underscore that the Dumagat-LPU engagement does not just foster solidarity but brings it back, pushing against the culture of individualism promoted by institutions. Through this lens, collective consciousness is not a passive cultural residue; it is an active decolonial force that preserves cohesion while allowing space for individual growth within community-defined parameters.
4. The post-COVID influx of support from external actors, particularly NGOs and local government units, did not simply supplement the Dumagat community’s initiatives but it validated their long-held efforts toward visibility, autonomy, and rights assertion. While it could be perceived that these supports emerged spontaneously, the groundwork laid by years of relational engagement with LPU created conditions for credibility and recognition. The community’s ability to organize and register themselves, an anticipated outcome of LPU’s initial educational interventions, allowed them to access platforms like the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) and receive aid from groups such as Tzu Chi Philippines. This

underscores a deeper narrative that institutional partnerships rooted in decolonial principles can serve as leverage points for marginalized groups to reclaim cultural agency (Smith, 1999; Alfred, 2009). From dependency to recognition, the Dumagat community's progress underscores how true resilience arises from networks and shared agency, not external aid alone (Norris et al., 2008)/ The LPU-Dumgat partnership quietly shifted from a giver-receiver model to one of co-resilience built on trust.

5. The absence of "critical" responses in this study should not be mistaken for unequivocal satisfaction. Silence may reflect a cautious diplomacy, survival-driven gratitude, or what Simpson (2017) has argued that it is an act of refusal. This could be a deliberate or intentional withholding rather than absence of insight. This complicates the researchers-participant dynamic, especially when institutional presence is tied to material or symbolic support. When communities rely on institutional support, expressions of critique may be suppressed to preserve relationships. Wilson (2008) has pointed out that relational accountability demands not just gratitude, but also for dissent. Without it, partnerships risk becoming performative rather than transformative.
6. Despite the silence of the majority of participants on potential criticism or negative experiences, the study still reveals that unintended interventions, though being unplanned, have significantly contributed to the strengthening of group cohesion and deepened relational ties between LPU and the Dumagat community. Through sustained engagement, trust was cultivated, cultural identity was revitalized, and collective action emerged. Even though there were methodological limits, the findings attest that authentic partnerships grow not only from structured programs but also from relational encounters that foster mutual recognition and co-resilience.

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