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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, PANTAWID, PAMILYANG, PILIPINO, PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES IN GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS IN DAVAO DEL SUR

¹Sheruel G. Matalandang, ²Zandro P. Ibanez, ³Siverlyn M. Camposano, ⁴Rose Marie N. Busa, ⁵Augie E. Fuentes, ⁶Christian D. Enero, ⁷Rikka Bianca Condes, ⁸Michael G. Auditor, ⁹Alma Lyn S. Miase, ¹⁰Jibrán A. Tomindug, ¹¹Maria Althea R. Caralos, ¹²Princess Justine M. Dugasan, ¹³Kenneth L. Sanido, ¹⁴Ronairah D. Dindang, ¹⁵Maria Cristina P. Obeso, ¹⁶Lovely V. Echalar, ¹⁷Beverly Balderaz, ¹⁸Ryzle A. Grancho ¹⁹Roel Jr. D. Apas, ²⁰Roy P. Molina*

^{1,3,3,4,5,6,7}Davao del Sur State College, Philippines

^{9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16}Mindanao State University - General Santos, Philippines

^{17,18,19,20}Davao del Sur State College, Philippines

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Corresponding Author: Sheruel Matalandang
(matalandangsheruel@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) of Davao del Sur, Philippines. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research explores how IP communities interpret, negotiate, and respond to the program's conditional cash transfer (CCT) mechanisms within their cultural and socio-economic contexts. Data reveal that while 4Ps serves as a critical lifeline supporting education, food security, and basic health needs, beneficiaries perceive it as alalay (support) rather than a long-term solution to poverty. The study highlights tensions between program conditionalities and Indigenous belief systems, particularly in health-seeking behaviors and civil registration practices. Findings also show that IP beneficiaries actively adapt state interventions while preserving cultural identity, demonstrating resilience, agency, and alternative notions of development and well-being. However, structural challenges such as delayed fund releases, geographic isolation, and limited service accessibility constrain program effectiveness. Anchored in Sen's Capability Approach and theories of ethnicity and pluralism, the study argues that poverty among IPs is multidimensional and culturally embedded. It proposes a culturally responsive framework Culturally Anchored Social Protection Pathways (CASPP) to enhance policy relevance, inclusivity, and sustainability. The study contributes to discourse on social protection, Indigenous inclusion, and development practice by emphasizing the need for culturally grounded, context-sensitive program implementation.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous Peoples, 4Ps, conditional cash transfer, legal literacy, cultural inclusion, GIDAs, Mindanao.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the remote upland barangays of Davao del Sur, the road to receiving government aid is more than a path through mountains and rivers; it is a journey through the cycle of poverty, walked with endurance, hope, and quiet defiance. Mothers from the Blaan, Tagakaulo, Bagobo Tagabawa, and Kalagan communities set out under the punishing sun, clutching passbooks and children's report cards as though holding onto the very thread that ties them to a better tomorrow. For them, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is not merely a conditional cash transfer; it is a fragile lifeline that interrupts, however briefly, the relentless inheritance of deprivation. It places women at the center as guardians of both resources and resilience, challenging the odds to keep their families afloat.

One of the Philippine government's flagship programs aimed at breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty is the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Since its pilot implementation in 2007, the program has been sustained across several administrations as a key poverty-alleviation strategy targeting poor and marginalized Filipino households.

Central to the 4Ps is the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) scheme, which provides financial assistance to beneficiary households contingent upon compliance with specific health, nutrition, and education requirements. These conditions include regular health check-ups and deworming for children aged 0-5, at least 85% school attendance for children aged 3-18, and the mandatory participation of a responsible household member in Family Development Sessions (FDS) facilitated by City or Municipal Links. These conditionalities are anchored on the premise that investments in human capital particularly health and education are critical pathways out of poverty.

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program likewise supports the Philippine government's commitments to global development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, subsequently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, child survival, and maternal health. The institutionalization of the program through Republic Act No. 11310 further underscores the government's long-term commitment to social protection and inclusive development.

As a nationwide program, 4Ps covers diverse populations, including Indigenous Peoples (IPs) living in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged

Areas (GIDAs). In provinces such as Davao del Sur, IP communities often face compounded vulnerabilities due to remoteness, limited access to basic services, and the tension between state-led development interventions and indigenous cultural systems. While the program employs standardized targeting mechanisms such as household assessments based on income and socioeconomic indicators additional coordination with local government units, indigenous leaders, and community organizations is often necessary to ensure culturally sensitive and equitable implementation in IP contexts.

Despite the program's broad coverage and institutional backing, questions remain regarding how Indigenous Peoples experience the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in their everyday lives, particularly in GIDAs. Their narratives may reveal not only material benefits but also unintended consequences, cultural negotiations, exclusions, or silences that are often overlooked in program evaluations focused solely on quantitative outcomes.

Anchored on these realities, this study "The Road Not Taken: The Lived Experiences of Indigenous Peoples Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program Beneficiaries in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas in Davao del Sur" seeks to surface the voices, meanings, and interpretations of IP beneficiaries as they navigate the promises and limitations of the 4Ps within their cultural and social landscapes.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The main thrust of the study is to understand and narrate the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas in Davao del Sur.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas in Davao del Sur?
2. What strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) are encountered in the implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in these areas?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what culturally responsive program intervention may be developed to enhance the effectiveness of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program among Indigenous Peoples?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in GIDAs of Davao del Sur, particularly in relation to cultural implications affecting their traditional practices, values, identity, and ways of life.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS (LGUS) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DEPED)

The findings of the study may serve as a reference for local government units and partner agencies in improving the design and implementation of social protection and education-related programs. By identifying the program's strengths and opportunities, as well as its weaknesses and threats, LGUs may better maximize limited resources and develop more inclusive and culturally attuned interventions at the local level.

2.1. Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

For the primary implementing agency, the study provides insights into the challenges and risks encountered in program implementation in IP and GIDA contexts. These findings may aid in the formulation of mitigation strategies, contingency plans, and culturally sensitive approaches for scaling up or replicating the program in similar areas. The study may also inform policymakers and implementers on how program dynamics influence beneficiary satisfaction and compliance.

2.2. Policymakers

The results of the study may serve as empirical inputs for future policy formulation and decision-making related to social protection programs. It may assist in refining administrative structures, improving service delivery mechanisms, and strengthening local policies and ordinances to ensure that national programs are responsive to indigenous contexts.

Given the substantial portion of the national budget allocated to the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, this study also highlights the importance of effective monitoring, cultural integration, and localized implementation to ensure that public resources translate into meaningful and sustainable outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

2.3. Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program Beneficiaries

For IP beneficiaries, the study provides a

platform for their voices to be heard. It may open opportunities for enhanced capacity-building initiatives, livelihood support, and employment opportunities, while also serving as a feedback mechanism on how the program affects their lives and communities.

Future Researchers

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Indigenous Peoples, social protection, and development interventions. It may serve as a reference for future qualitative and phenomenological studies examining culture-sensitive program implementation in marginalized and geographically isolated settings.

2.4. Scope and Delimitation

This study focuses on the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas in Davao del Sur. It specifically examines the cultural implications of the program in relation to indigenous traditional practices, values, and identity, as well as the perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in its implementation. The study also aims to propose a culturally responsive intervention to enhance program effectiveness.

As a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry, the study is limited to selected Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries within the identified GIDAs of Davao del Sur. Aspects not explicitly covered within these parameters are considered beyond the scope of the study.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

On the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program

Based on data from 2009, poverty estimates derived from the Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) revealed that approximately 23.1 million Filipinos were living below the poverty line, accounting for nearly one-fourth of the national population (Chaudry *et al.*, 2013). During this period, the Philippines encountered significant challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction, universal education, and improved health outcomes. These challenges were largely attributed to persistent inequalities in access to basic social services across income groups and geographic regions, with rural, remote, and marginalized communities experiencing the most severe deprivation.

The FIES serves as a critical national instrument for assessing poverty, generating comprehensive

data on household income, expenditure patterns, and living conditions. The magnitude of poverty reflected in the 2009 estimates underscores deep-seated structural inequalities and chronic economic vulnerability. These conditions are especially pronounced among populations residing in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs), where limited infrastructure, poor access to services, and historical marginalization intersect. In Davao del Sur, many Indigenous Peoples (IPs) communities fall within this category, experiencing poverty not only as a lack of income but also as constrained access to education, healthcare, and state support.

In response to these realities, the Philippine government institutionalized the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) through Republic Act No. 11310 as a flagship conditional cash transfer intervention. The program is anchored on investments in health and education, premised on the assumption that improving human capital among poor households can interrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Rather than treating poverty solely as income deprivation, the 4Ps frames it as a multidimensional condition affecting long-term well-being, productivity, and social inclusion.

However, as revealed in the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries in the GIDAs of Davao del Sur, the program is not perceived as a permanent solution nor a source of dependency. Beneficiaries repeatedly emphasized that the cash grants function merely as *alalay* a form of assistance that supplements, but does not replace, personal effort and livelihood activities. As one participant explained, relying entirely on the program was not feasible, as the assistance is limited and episodic. This perspective reflects a strong ethic of self-reliance and dignity, challenging common assumptions that conditional cash transfer programs foster dependency among marginalized populations.

3.1. 4Ps and Indigenous Peoples

For Indigenous Peoples residing in GIDAs of Davao del Sur, participation in the 4Ps program marked a significant transformation in their interaction with formal state institutions. Historically, many IP communities relied on customary systems and traditional authorities to manage life events, including childbirth, illness, and death. Seeking pre- and post-natal care from formal healthcare providers or registering births and deaths with civil authorities was not a common practice.

Compliance with 4Ps conditionalities, however, required official documentation such as birth

certificates and health records. This compelled IP women often for the first time to engage with civil registration systems, schools, and health centers. During interviews, registration emerged as one of the most challenging aspects of program participation. Several women expressed uncertainty about their children's exact birth dates, instead situating births in relation to natural markers such as the full moon or seasonal changes. This highlights a fundamental tension between bureaucratic time linear, calendar-based, and document-driven and indigenous temporal frameworks rooted in nature and lived experience.

Despite these difficulties, participation in the program gradually facilitated greater engagement with public services. Women attended Family Development Sessions (FDS), accompanied their children to health check-ups, and ensured school attendance. These requirements, while externally imposed, also opened spaces for social interaction, information exchange, and collective learning among IP women, contributing to a sense of shared experience and mutual support.

3.2. On Being Filipinos

Nationality plays a crucial role in shaping identity, as it offers individuals a sense of belonging and answers the existential question of "who am I" (Hofstede, 1983). Among Indigenous Peoples in Davao del Sur, however, identity is primarily anchored in ancestral lineage, land, language, and cultural practice rather than in the abstract notion of the nation-state.

Participation in the 4Ps program nonetheless prompted some informants to recognize themselves as Filipinos, albeit in a limited and symbolic sense. For many, being "Filipino" was associated with speaking Tagalog, living in urban centers, and possessing economic stability attributes they perceived as distant from their lived realities. One informant described being Indigenous as synonymous with freedom, farming, forest life, and a deep connection with nature, while Filipino identity was confined to official documents and program compliance.

Engagement with Filipino popular culture, particularly television dramas and movies, was cited as one of the few tangible connections to national life. However, consuming news and political discourse did not foster a stronger sense of inclusion. Instead, geographical isolation and cultural distance from the central government reinforced feelings of marginalization. Many informants expressed the belief that national and urban institutions were

inattentive to their needs because of their location in the peripheries and their identification as IPs.

From a pluralist perspective, as articulated by Jenkins (2008) and drawing on Barth's framework, Philippine society can be understood as a heterogeneous system where multiple ethnic identities coexist within a single political structure. While citizenship may be legally uniform, lived experiences of belonging remain uneven. As M.G. Smith (1974, cited in Jenkins) argued, ethnic differences may not formally define citizenship, yet they continue to shape access, recognition, and participation in everyday life.

3.3. *On Using the Money*

Among Indigenous Peoples beneficiaries, 4Ps cash grants are typically released to women, who play a central role in household decision-making. The lived experiences of the respondents revealed diverse spending patterns that both align with and diverge from the program's intended use.

Many beneficiaries prioritized food, school-related expenses, and medicines. Others explained that the arrival of the cash grant provided an opportunity to settle debts, as borrowing money for daily necessities was common during periods of scarcity. However, respondents frequently emphasized that the amount received often ranging from ₱300 to ₱400 was insufficient and quickly exhausted.

At the same time, several informants reported using the money to purchase gold, clothing, appliances, or to finance weddings and communal celebrations. Despite residing in modest stilt houses, some households possessed significant quantities of gold and adornments, reflecting indigenous cultural values where wealth functions as security, status, and a form of savings. Weddings, in particular, were described as important social obligations requiring generosity and visible abundance. One respondent noted that spending freely during such occasions was a way of honoring family ties and community expectations, even if it meant depleting available resources.

A smaller number of beneficiaries reported investing larger cash releases in farming tools, seeds, or small livelihood activities. These investments, though limited in scale, illustrate efforts to translate short-term assistance into longer-term economic gains.

Health Is Wealth?

Conventional, income-based measures of poverty often fail to capture the lived realities of Indigenous Peoples when detached from their cultural context

(Broch-Due & Anderson, 1999). Under the 4Ps program, households are entitled to a monthly ₱500 health grant, contingent upon compliance with health protocols such as immunization, regular check-ups, and growth monitoring. However, many IP families do not consistently adhere to these requirements due to deeply rooted belief systems.

When illness occurs, families typically consult traditional healers who prescribe rituals involving prayers and offerings to sacred trees. Once these rituals are performed, seeking biomedical treatment is often prohibited, as it is believed to bring misfortune or offend ancestral spirits. This belief system tragically contributed to the deaths of five children in one community due to measles deaths that could likely have been prevented through vaccination and timely medical care.

Measles disproportionately affects undernourished children living in poverty (Rosling, 2015), and reductions in child mortality are widely regarded as indicators of human progress. Yet health outcomes are shaped not only by access to services but also by education, living standards, and the negotiation between cultural beliefs and state interventions.

Following the incident, local authorities conducted a medical mission that vaccinated children and educated parents on disease prevention. While compliance increased, respondents reaffirmed their continued belief in traditional healing practices. As one informant stated, "I do not want to fail my ancestors or incur their displeasure." This response underscores the enduring authority of ancestral traditions even in the face of modern health interventions.

Using Barth's (1967) framework, these dynamics demonstrate that external programs such as the 4Ps can trigger behavioral change without erasing cultural identity. Instead, the community selectively adapts, reinforcing core values such as reverence for ancestral authority, rituals, food, and symbolic wealth.

3.4. *Toward The Road Not Taken*

By integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems, practices, and belief structures, this study reveals alternative interpretations of poverty, well-being, and development paths often overlooked by standardized program designs. The metaphor *The Road Not Taken* captures the divergence between policy intent and lived reality, emphasizing that development trajectories are neither linear nor uniform.

For Indigenous Peoples in the GIDAs of Davao del

Sur, the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program represents both opportunity and tension: a pathway toward education, health, and inclusion, and a site where state expectations intersect with enduring cultural values. Recognizing and engaging with these realities is essential for crafting culturally responsive social protection programs that respect indigenous identity while safeguarding life, dignity, and future possibilities.

4. THEMES

The in-depth narratives and lived experiences shared by the informants reveal that the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) has generated multidimensional impacts on Indigenous Peoples (IPs), particularly in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs). These impacts go beyond income supplementation and extend into domains of poverty reduction, social well-being, financial management, livelihood strategies, identity formation, and state engagement. Through thematic analysis, the researchers distilled these experiences into interrelated themes that illuminate how government interventions are interpreted, negotiated, and localized within indigenous lifeworlds. These themes are presented in Figure 1 and discussed in detail below.

4.1. *Providing Families' Basic Needs*

The first theme centers on the program's role in addressing poverty by enabling families to meet their most fundamental needs. For the Indigenous Peoples interviewed, poverty is not merely defined by income scarcity but by the daily struggle to secure food, education for their children, and basic health needs. Across interviews, informants consistently identified food security, schooling, and healthcare as their most pressing concerns.

Participants explicitly attributed their ability to address these needs to the 4Ps program. The conditional cash grants were described as alalay a form of assistance that helps families survive but does not replace personal effort or livelihood. This framing is significant, as it challenges dominant assumptions that cash transfer programs foster dependency.

Participant 3 (P3) emphasized that the program enabled them to continue sending their children to school, aligning with the core objectives of 4Ps. Participant 5 (P5) highlighted how the program directly supports daily necessities, while Participant 4 (P4) explained that the allowance is carefully allocated for school expenses and household essentials. Participant 2 (P2) shared that the program

improved their children's health by enabling the purchase of vitamins and nutritious food and expressed pride that their son was able to complete senior high school because of the assistance. Participant 6 (P6) noted that most of the funds are allocated to school materials, with the remainder used for household needs.

These accounts demonstrate that the cash grants are primarily used to prevent severe deprivation rather than to accumulate wealth. This finding aligns with Reyes et al. (2013), who found that the 4Ps program improves children's health, nutrition, and education outcomes, and with Dela Torre (2016), who emphasized that the program supplements household income while promoting human capital investment. In this context, poverty aligns with Crossman's (2017) definition as the lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare.

Consistent with Montilla et al. (2015) and Ranario (2015), the findings affirm that the 4Ps program functions as a lifeline for families in extreme poverty. The narratives further support Vigilla et al. (2016) and Aranas et al. (2021), who observed that beneficiaries tend to budget the cash grants for education-related expenses rather than spending them impulsively. Overall, the program has played a crucial role in buffering families against extreme hardship, particularly in communities where alternative sources of income are unstable and seasonal.

4.2. *Promoting Families' Well-Being*

Beyond material support, the 4Ps program has significantly influenced the psychosocial well-being of beneficiaries. This second theme highlights how the program contributes to a sense of security, dignity, and emotional relief among Indigenous Peoples who have long experienced marginalization.

Participants described a marked improvement in their quality of life, noting that the program reduced anxiety related to food scarcity, schooling, and healthcare. Well-being, as articulated by the informants, was not defined solely by economic comfort but by emotional stability feeling less worried, more confident, and more hopeful.

Participant 2 (P2) stated that their life feels more stable and that they worry less about meeting daily needs. Participant 4 (P4) expressed relief as a mother who no longer struggles to support her child's education. Participant 5 (P5) described feeling happier and more confident, as the program reduced the emotional burden of being labeled mahirap.

These narratives suggest that the program

mitigates not only economic deprivation but also the social stigma associated with poverty. This finding echoes Pineda and Fabella (2019), who observed that government support programs motivate parents to assume greater responsibility and work toward improved living conditions. Similarly, Aranas et al. (2021) highlighted the role of conditional cash transfers in improving overall human well-being.

For Indigenous Peoples, well-being is deeply relational and culturally embedded. Participation in Family Development Sessions (FDS) also fostered social interaction among women, creating spaces for shared learning and mutual support. In this way, the program contributed to social inclusion, albeit within the constraints of existing cultural and geographic marginalization.

4.3. Promoting Budgeting Skills and Financial Awareness

A third theme emerging from the interviews is the development of budgeting skills and financial discipline among beneficiaries. Participants consistently described learning how to allocate limited resources strategically, prioritizing education and household necessities.

Participant 5 (P5) shared that they maintain a list of expenses to separate school-related costs from household needs. Participant 2 (P2) emphasized budgeting for their children's education as a primary responsibility. Participant 4 (P4) explained that they reserve funds for school supplies and packed lunches in advance, while Participant 6 (P6) described carefully dividing the allowance between education and household expenses.

These practices demonstrate that beneficiaries actively engage in financial decision-making, contradicting narratives that portray poor households as financially irresponsible. This finding supports Diaz (2021), who argued that program conditionalities indirectly instill discipline and encourage beneficiaries to plan and prioritize expenditures.

However, budgeting occurs within severe structural constraints. Informants repeatedly emphasized that the amount received is small and quickly depleted, especially in the context of rising prices of basic goods. Thus, while financial literacy has improved, the effectiveness of budgeting remains limited by the inadequacy and irregularity of cash transfers.

4.4. Providing Capital for Families' Livelihood

The fourth theme highlights how beneficiaries attempt to transform short-term assistance into

longer-term livelihood opportunities. Before becoming beneficiaries, participants described their lives as characterized by unstable income and limited employment opportunities. The 4Ps program motivated them to seek alternative sources of income rather than rely solely on government assistance.

Participant 1 (P1) established a small sari-sari store using funds from the program, enabling additional income generation. Participant 4 (P4) used the cash assistance to purchase fishing gear, emphasizing the importance of not depending entirely on government aid. Participant 6 (P6) shared their experience starting a halo-halo business, which was eventually discontinued due to rising costs.

These efforts illustrate resilience and entrepreneurial initiative, even within constrained economic environments. The findings align with Chaudhury and Okamura (2013), who noted beneficiaries' interest in entrepreneurship training, and with Millanar (2019), who found that the 4Ps program motivates adults to engage in livelihood activities.

Importantly, participants were acutely aware that the program is not permanent. This awareness motivated them to invest, however modestly, in productive activities. Mothers, in particular, emerged as resourceful agents who maximize limited resources to improve their families' quality of life.

4.5. Issues and Challenges

Despite its benefits, the 4Ps program is not without significant challenges. One of the most frequently cited issues was the delayed and unpredictable release of funds. Informants reported delays of up to three months, with little information provided regarding release schedules. Beneficiaries often rushed to the bank based on rumors, only to find no funds available.

One respondent recounted being told they had a negative balance despite months of delayed disbursement, leaving the bank without any money. These uncertainties forced families to borrow money often with interest to cover emergencies such as hospitalization, food needs, and even culturally significant events like weddings. When the funds finally arrived, they were frequently used to repay debts.

Another troubling issue involved individuals collecting "membership fees" after fund distribution, sometimes using intimidation and threats. Notably, some of these individuals were fellow Indigenous Peoples, highlighting internal power dynamics and vulnerabilities within the community.

4.6. Indigenous Peoples and the Government

For many informants, the government is primarily experienced through programs like the 4Ps rather than through sustained presence or engagement. Politicians were perceived as visible only during elections, when visits were accompanied by expectations of financial assistance. Outside election periods, state presence was described as minimal.

In education, the 4Ps program significantly increased school attendance by providing incentives such as free notebooks and feeding programs. However, limitations in funding restricted feeding programs to once a week, resulting in fluctuating attendance. Migratory practices and early marriages further contributed to high dropout rates.

Concerns were also raised regarding teacher absenteeism and irregular class schedules in public schools. In contrast, a missionary-run school provided consistent education and daily feeding but faced resistance from parents who feared religious conversion.

Change Has Come?

Perceptions of change varied among informants. Some believed life had become more difficult due to rising prices and inadequate income, while others felt their lives were more stable because of government assistance. Health conditions, however, were widely perceived to have deteriorated due to poor nutrition, sanitation, and limited access to clean water.

Tragic accounts of children dying from measles highlighted the intersection of poverty, cultural beliefs, and inadequate healthcare access. While medical missions introduced vaccinations, traditional healing practices remained central, reflecting enduring cultural values and ancestral authority.

Now, Who Is Poor?

Consistent with Rosling (2015) and Broch-Due and Anderson (1999), poverty in this study emerged as a culturally constructed and multidimensional condition. Informants emphasized that as long as they had food, land, and community, they did not consider themselves poor. Wealth was often defined not by income but by having a sturdy home and access to nature's resources.

On Development

Development, as framed by the state, often equates progress with modernization. However, Indigenous Peoples articulated a distinction between contentment and poverty. Living day by day, consuming what is available, and prioritizing belonging over accumulation reflects an alternative development logic that challenges dominant

paradigms (Talle, 1999).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Findings

The study examined the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) of Davao del Sur. Using a phenomenological approach, the research revealed that while 4Ps provides critical support for basic needs, education, and health, its implementation encounters cultural, structural, and contextual limitations.

Key findings indicate that IP beneficiaries view 4Ps as alalay (support) rather than a permanent solution to poverty. The program contributed to improved school attendance, food security, and access to health services, yet these gains remained fragile due to limited cash amounts, delayed releases, and geographic isolation. Identity negotiations emerged, as IPs experienced symbolic inclusion as Filipinos through program participation, while maintaining strong allegiance to indigenous identity, traditions, and belief systems. Health conditionalities, in particular, conflicted with traditional healing practices, revealing gaps between policy design and cultural realities.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Poverty among Indigenous Peoples is multidimensional and culturally embedded;
 2. Income-based interventions alone are insufficient to address structural inequality in GIDAs.
 3. The 4Ps program expands basic capabilities but does not guarantee long-term empowerment.
- Consistent with Sen's Capability Approach, improvements in education and health are evident, yet constrained by systemic barriers.
4. Indigenous communities actively adapt state interventions without abandoning cultural identity.
- In line with Barth's theory, IP beneficiaries integrate 4Ps into existing survival strategies while preserving ethnic boundaries.
5. Formal citizenship does not equate to substantive inclusion.

As explained by Jenkins' pluralism, IPs remain marginalized despite legal inclusion due to geographic, cultural, and institutional distance.

6. Health conditionalities reveal the limits of technocratic governance.

Without culturally responsive mechanisms,

program compliance may inadvertently place lives at risk.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. For the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)

1.1 Contextualize Conditionalities in GIDAs

DSWD should adopt flexible conditionality frameworks for Indigenous Peoples in GIDAs, particularly in health and education. Conditionalities must be negotiated with tribal leaders and traditional healers to ensure cultural legitimacy and compliance without coercion.

1.2 Enhance Grant Adequacy and Timeliness

Cash transfer amounts should be adjusted using a geographic cost-of-living index, considering transportation costs and market access limitations in GIDAs. Predictable and timely release schedules must be institutionalized.

1.3 Transform Family Development Sessions (FDS)

FDS should be redesigned as culturally responsive platforms incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs), focusing on health, nutrition, parenting, and livelihood resilience rather than uniform behavioral compliance.

2. For Local Government Units (LGUs)

2.1 Strengthen Inter-Agency Coordination

LGUs should establish a permanent IP-focused coordination mechanism involving DSWD, NCIP, DOH, DepEd, and barangay councils to ensure harmonized service delivery in GIDAs.

2.2 Integrate 4Ps with Local Development Plans

4Ps interventions should be aligned with Local Development Investment Programs (LDIPs) and Comprehensive Development Plans (CDPs), ensuring sustainability beyond cash transfers.

2.3 Improve Accessibility of Basic Services

LGUs must prioritize mobile schools, health caravans, and satellite service centers in remote IP communities to reduce structural exclusion.

3. For the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP)

3.1 Institutionalize Cultural Mediation

NCIP should formalize the role of cultural mediators or IP facilitators within the 4Ps implementation structure to bridge indigenous and state systems.

3.2 Safeguard Indigenous Identity in Social Protection Programs

Policies must explicitly recognize indigenous identity as a development asset, not a barrier, ensuring that social protection programs do not

erode ancestral practices or autonomy.

4. For the Department of Health (DOH)

4.1 Adopt Culturally Negotiated Health Governance

DOH should collaborate with traditional healers and community elders in designing culturally appropriate health interventions, particularly vaccination campaigns and maternal care.

4.2 Shift from Enforcement to Education

Health compliance strategies should emphasize dialogue, trust-building, and culturally grounded health education rather than punitive sanctions.

5. For Policymakers and Legislators

5.1 Review and Amend 4Ps Policy Frameworks for GIDAs

Legislative reviews should consider differentiated policy instruments for Indigenous Peoples, allowing localized implementation within national standards.

5.2 Increase Budgetary Support for IP-Specific Interventions

Dedicated funding lines for IP-sensitive social protection and livelihood programs should be institutionalized.

Table 10. Proposed Program Intervention: Culturally Anchored Social Protection Pathways (CASPP).

Core Component	Description	Key Activities
Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) Integration	Recognizes Indigenous worldviews, traditions, and decision-making systems as legitimate foundations of social protection	• Documentation of local IKSPs
• Inclusion of elders and tribal leaders in program design		
• Integration of IKSPs into Family Development Sessions (FDS)	NCIP, DSWD, LGUs, Tribal Councils, Elders	• Increased cultural legitimacy of programs
• Higher compliance rooted in trust		
• Preservation of indigenous identity	Barth (1967) – Cultural boundaries persist amid change	
Flexible Conditionalities	Adapts health and education requirements to local realities in GIDAs	• Context-based health compliance options
• Negotiated education attendance during migration cycles		

• Conditionality exemptions during emergencies	DSWD, DepEd, DOH, Barangay Councils	• Reduced exclusion and sanctions
• Improved participation without coercion		
• Rights-based compliance	Sen (1999) - Expansion of real freedoms	
Livelihood Incubation and Economic Resilience	Moves beyond cash transfers toward sustainable, culturally appropriate livelihoods	• Skills training (farming, crafts, micro-enterprises)
• Seed capital or tool provision		
• Cooperative formation	DSWD, DA, TESDA, LGUs, NGOs	• Reduced dependency on cash transfers
• Enhanced household resilience		
• Strengthened local economies	Sen (1999) - Capability enhancement	
Community-Led Health Governance	Combines biomedical care with traditional healing systems	• Partnership with traditional healers
• Community health dialogues		
• Mobile and culturally adapted health missions	DOH, DSWD, NCIP, Traditional Healers	• Improved health-seeking behavior
• Reduced preventable deaths		
• Trust in public health services	Jenkins (2008) - Negotiated belonging	
Capability-Based Monitoring and Evaluation	Shifts evaluation from income metrics to lived well-being and agency	• Indicators on education retention, food security, autonomy
• Participatory community assessments		
• Qualitative monitoring tools	DSWD, LGUs, Academic Institutions	• More accurate poverty measurement
• Policy feedback grounded in lived realities		
• Evidence-based refinement	Sen (1999) - Functionings and capabilities	

rather than passive beneficiaries, CASPP transforms social protection from mere income supplementation into capability expansion and dignified inclusion.

The CASPP framework directly responds to the identified weaknesses and threats in the SWOT analysis, particularly delayed fund releases, cultural mismatch, and limited long-term impact. By embedding Indigenous Peoples as co-governors