

# Actualizing the Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Education: A Policy Initiative in the Philippines

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**I**NDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES<sup>1</sup> in the Philippines have been advocating for almost five decades for an education that is sensitive to, and reflective of, their cultural context, aspirations and concerns. This advocacy has intensified during the last twenty five years in light of increasing number of indigenous schools or education programs established and managed by the indigenous communities despite the existence of public schools in the area. This highlights the growing dissatisfaction of the indigenous communities with the educational system of the government, and their strong desire to provide an education that is deemed appropriate to their children and youth.

The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) responded with a national educational policy, the first comprehensive rights-based educational policy framework of the government.

This interface of perspectives concerning indigenous peoples' concept of education is a rare example of policy development. This educational policy demonstrates that the "rights" concept is not just a topic to be integrated into the school curriculum. Rather, rights should be meaningfully applied in policy-making in order to realize an education that is responsive and relevant to the situation of indigenous children and youth.

## **National Educational Policy**

The Secretary (Armin A. Luistro) of DepEd signed Department Order 62 s. 2011 (DO62) entitled, "Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Policy Framework"<sup>2</sup> on 8 August 2011. He noted in his speech that DO62 was DepEd's modest contribution to the celebration of the World Indigenous People's Day for that year. This international day is celebrated on August 9 of each year. He emphasized that DO62 aimed "to create an educational system [that was] inclusive and respectful of learners belonging

This article discusses how this educational policy reflects the interface of the government's perspective with the customary perspective of indigenous communities pertinent to education.

to the minority groups,” and that the country’s basic education should be one that would “...recognize and promote the rights and welfare of indigenous peoples to enable them to face various social realities and challenges” (Calleja, 2011).

Secretary Luistro stressed further that DO62

recognizes the faults of the past. It is an invitation for us to change our perspective – the glasses that we normally use to see reality –and exchange that with a perspective that allows us to really be inclusive. Furthermore, it is an invitation to learn with, not just teach in, indigenous communities that have always been on the sidelines (IPsEO, 2012).

The signing of DO62 was the culmination of a three-year journey of the indigenous communities in their dialogue with DepEd towards a rights-based, comprehensive, and systemic policy on culturally responsive education for indigenous children and youth. Previous efforts of indigenous communities and their partners in engaging DepEd on policy directives were limited to specific concerns (e.g., recognition of community-based schools in indigenous peoples’ areas, production of educational resources), local in scope (regional, division, school levels), and tended to focus on service delivery.

DO62 is the first national educational policy that interfaces the customary perspective of indigenous communities with that of the national government. Its birth is also the beginning of a long-term commitment of both the indigenous communities and DepEd in making the policy objectives concrete realities for indigenous children and youth.

### **Education for Self-determination**

The educational perspective of the communities of indigenous peoples in the Philippines parallels the international concepts on indigenous education. The educational philosophy of these educational initiatives are akin to the concept of Indigenous Learning Systems (ILS) **which provide that a community nurtures into personhood each generation of children, with the expectation that the succeeding generations will take on the responsibilities that will assure the continuing life and development of the community.** The understanding and articulation of indigenous knowledge and wisdom

by these Philippine indigenous educational initiatives also find similarity with the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPS) that bring to life the indigenous systems and practices and are continually enriched by the succeeding generations. Since the IKSPS are expressed collectively by indigenous communities through time as their way of life – what we today call culture - they become foundational and inherent to the wellbeing and sense of collective and personal identity of these communities.

Viewed this way, education and culture are thus understood to be intrinsically intertwined, and are central to the life of the community.

The formal education system in the Philippines had not addressed this aspect of indigenous peoples' educational needs. The indigenous peoples instead encountered barriers to finishing schooling. Aside from the usual problem of access to and quality of education in the school system that caused high drop-out rate among indigenous children, there were hidden barriers such as the following:

- Experiences of discrimination based on one's ethnic identity, considered to be "native" or "tribal;"
- Difficulties with the language of learning because the language used in school was different from what was used at home and in the community. The inconsistency of languages used hindered the development of learning skills and comprehension of topics being discussed;
- Comprehension difficulties because the social and cultural contexts of the lessons differed very much from the realities of the indigenous children's communities; and
- Cognitive dissonance and personal tensions that became tensions in the family and community because their identity and the way of life practiced at home and in the community were negated and/or considered primitive and backward in school.

As summarized in a consolidated national study by the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (2008), these hidden barriers have brought about the "alienation of indigenous youth from their own communities, heritage, culture and history." The impact of this alienation of indigenous youth on the community was summed up by community elders who posed the questions:<sup>3</sup>

- What will happen to our culture if our youth see it as primitive, backward and something to throw away?

- What will happen to our sense of community if our children experience their indigenous identity as a source of shame?
- What will happen to our intergenerational relationships if the younger generation continues to **view the elders and culture-bearers** in the community (which includes their grandparents) as obsolete and backward?
- What will happen to our ancestral domains if our youth do not value them as an inheritance from our ancestors, to be cared for and developed for their generation and the coming generations?

These were life and death questions that indigenous communities had to face by asserting self-determination. It was from this impetus that the indigenous communities in various parts of the country started to conceptualize, organize and manage their own community-based education programs as far back as the 1970s. While expressed in varied ways, the common threads across these initiatives were the following features:

- A strong advocacy for culture-based educational programming;
- The ancestral domain<sup>4</sup> as the learning space and purpose of education;
- Inclusion of community history in the educational content;
- Conscious effort to nurture and affirm the learner's indigenous identity;
- Integration of ILS and IKSPs in the curriculum; and
- Promotion of indigenous peoples' rights and welfare.

The synthesized aspirations articulated during the 2004 forum on "Developing a Culturally-Appropriate Education System for Filipino Indigenous Peoples Towards Sustainable Development" (Buasen, 2006) and during the 2005 National Assembly on Indigenous Education (Buasen, 2006) summarize the key features of an indigenous education:

- It develops their rootedness and security in their identity as indigenous youth;
- It nurtures and cultivates their indigenous ways and traditions;
- It instills in them the need to protect and care for their ancestral domains;
- It supports their right to self-determination; and

- It promotes the well-being of both the whole community and each member of the community.

Decades of implementing and discussing educational initiatives in indigenous communities show the essential role of culture. The civil society network subsequently adopted the term “IP Education (IPED)” to refer to such initiatives.

Before laws that protected the rights of indigenous peoples were enacted, the indigenous communities assert the need for culture-responsive education based on the moral assertion of human dignity; that all peoples regardless of their cultural background and all indigenous communities have an inherent right to be respected and accepted. This comes from a customary governance perspective that looks at the inherent dignity of each culture, even though inter-community tensions or conflicts exist. With the 1987 Constitution, the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the advocacy for IPED gained legal basis.

The 1987 Constitution commits the State to “recognize, respect, and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultural structures, traditions, and institutions” (Article XIV, Section 17), including indigenous learning systems (Article XIV, Section 2.4).

The right of indigenous peoples to develop their own educational systems is further supported by IPRA that requires the State to “provide equal access to various cultural opportunities to the ICCs/IPs [indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples] through the educational system, public or private cultural entities, scholarships, grants and other incentives without prejudice to their right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions by providing education in their own language, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (Section 30). (emphasis added)

At the international level, UNDRIP provides for the right of IPs “to establish and control their education systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning” (Art. 14.1, page 7).

The indigenous communities want an education that primarily nurtures the cultural wellbeing and personhood of their young. This becomes the

foundation for developing other competencies that can enable them and, subsequently, the indigenous communities to contribute to nation-building.

### **Fulfilling International Commitments**

While the journey of indigenous communities in articulating culture-responsive education meant valuing and protecting their roots through the assertion of self-determination, the journey of the DepEd in recognizing culture-responsive education was strongly influenced by international developments that impinged on national directions for education. Before the influence of international educational development affected DepEd, any call for culture-responsive education by the indigenous communities was met with the institutional stance that the curriculum of the national education system could not be modified and the formal education of all children and youth regardless of their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds should be based on it.

At least two major influences facilitated the DepEd's openness to the educational concerns of indigenous communities: international agreements particularly the Education for All (1990) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000); and the increased awareness and understanding about rights.

### **International declarations**

The 1990 World Declaration on Education For All (also known as Jomtien Declaration) had the theme "Meeting Basic Learning Needs" and emphasized the promotion of equity, focus on learning, broadened means and scope of basic education, enhanced learning environment and strengthening partnerships. The Jomtien Declaration cites the need to remove educational disparities regarding the underserved groups (including indigenous peoples). Its preamble recognizes that "traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development." The 2000 Dakar Framework for Action (with the theme "Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments") has aimed at "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (Section 7i). (emphasis added)

As a follow-up to the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, the 2000 Asia and the Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All (adopted by countries in the region including the Philippines) stresses that programs in early childhood care and education (ECCE) “must promote the child’s optimum physical, psycho-social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development in ways that are culturally and socially relevant.” The section on basic learning and skills programs provides that “[V]alues and cultural identity and their preservation must continue to find a prominent place in all learning programmes and teaching practices.” Basic literacy and numeracy skills must also “adopt participatory, age-appropriate, culturally sensitive and integrated approaches...”<sup>5</sup>

These international declarations made the cultural dimension in education more significant.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 further bolstered the directions of EFA especially with Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 on the universal access to primary education (United Nations, 2000, page 5).

The Philippines, in response to these calls, formulated the Philippine EFA 2015 National Action Plan which serves as the main framework to guide basic education reforms in the country until 2015. To further systematize these reforms and assure their alignment with international commitments and their responsiveness to the identified issues and concerns of the education sector in the country, DepEd conceptualized the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA). Both the Philippine EFA 2015 National Action Plan and BESRA provide a roadmap to meet the targets of EFA and the MDGs (DepEd, 2008).

The Plan enumerated nine specific tasks, including the task to “accelerate articulation, enrichment and development of the basic education curriculum in the context of the pillars of the new functional literacy.” BESRA, on the other hand, identified as one of its five Key Reform Thrusts (KRTs) “desired learning outcomes enhanced by the National Learning Strategies, Multi-sectoral Coordination and Quality Assurance.” Indigenous education was seen as one of the needed initiatives to meet these commitments.

In March 2008, the Indigenous Peoples Education Technical Working Group was created through DO16, s. 2008 with the task of formulating policy recommendations to move action forward.

### Discourse on rights

In the decades preceding EFA, educational issues and concerns were discussed from a frame of equitable delivery of education services and the dominant perspective was the needs-based approach. The discussions on EFA and the MDGs contributed to opening and shifting DepEd's institutional awareness to that of human rights and the rights-based approach. Among civil society groups, rights as a discourse was natural and even foundational, but for government institutions like DepEd, human rights was associated at that time with lawyers and civil society groups.

The Dakar Framework, for example, strongly articulates education in the context of human rights and not just as a social service that government agencies have to deliver (UNESCO, page 8). Further, it stresses that the right to education is fundamental in pursuing sustainable development, thereby linking education directions to national development goals with an anchorage on rights. Also highlighted in the Dakar framework is the importance of working with "civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development" (UNESCO, page 8).

MDGs are also articulated primarily from the perspective of rights and this frames the discussion about the equitable distribution of social services. The seven MDGs are viewed as concrete international targets to meet the basic human rights of every person to health, education, shelter and security (Millennium Project, 2006).

With the mandate to align educational policies with EFA and the MDGs, the DepEd became more exposed to the discourse on rights from the 1990s onward.

Several efforts at the national level related to promoting human rights further widened the institutional consciousness of DepEd regarding the rights discourse. In July 2002, the Philippine Congress enacted Republic Act 9201, "An Act Declaring December 4 to 10 as National Human Rights Consciousness Week in the Country and for Other Purposes," which enjoined all government offices and educational institutions, both private and public, to celebrate Human Rights Week. DepEd issued DO31 s. 2003 that required the celebration of Human Rights Week every December of the year. In May 2003, DepEd, in partnership with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP), undertook its initial activities to integrate human rights in the national curriculum (DepEd Memorandum 160, s. 2003), and by 2004, the first training of trainers on human rights education was held



(DepEd Memorandum 16, s. 2004). All Divisions of the Department were then enjoined to include human rights in their in-service training (INSET) for teachers from May 2004 to 2005 (DepEd Memorandum 130, s. 2004).

In 2005, with the enactment of the Republic Act 7610, "Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act," DepEd issued Memorandum 297, s. 2006 that listed acts violating this law, including "any act by deeds or words which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being."

DepEd supported the CHRP-organized First National Educators' Congress on Human Rights in 2009 by encouraging Social Studies supervisors and master teachers to attend (DepEd Memorandum 515, s. 2009). By this time, the words "human rights" became more or less familiar to teachers at the school level, even as their understanding and practice still needed to be deepened.

In the same decade that these two major influences unfolded, several Department Orders directly related to the educational concerns of indigenous communities were released that hinged on the recognition of their rights and on the ongoing efforts to achieve the country's commitments to EFA and the MDGs.

DO42 s 2004 (Permit to Operate Primary Schools for Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Communities) recognized the right of indigenous communities to initiate and manage their own educational initiatives and specified flexibility in the criteria to be used in assessing such schools should they be interested to seek recognition from DepEd as private schools. Up until 2004, the criteria for recognition of private schools did not include cultural and environmental considerations. With DO42, the school calendar could be adjusted according to the weather conditions of the locality, community resource persons were allowed to teach topics related to culture regardless of their academic background, and enhancements of the national school curriculum were allowed as long as the core learning competencies remained untouched.

In 2010, DepEd's Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS) released the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Core Curriculum for Indigenous Peoples. To assure appropriate attention to this material at the Divisions level, DepEd explicitly stated (under DO101, s. 2010) that this initiative was in response to the call of EFA to address the needs of marginalized students.

In the same year, DO23, s. 2010 (Adoption of the BESRA Accountability Plan, 2010-2012: A Blueprint for Transforming the Basic Education Sub-sector) identified **indigenous education as one of the main “foundation actions”** for BESRA implementation (Section 3).<sup>6</sup>

By the time the representatives of indigenous communities and DepEd came together from 2009 to 2010 to discuss more comprehensive policy directions to address the needs of indigenous children and youth, the ground for dialogue especially on the side of DepEd was fertile, and both parties were ready to explore responsive innovations.

### **DO62: The Interface of Perspectives**

The 2009-2010 consultations on crafting the national policy framework for indigenous **people’s education resulted in agreement on several main interface points** that served as bases in formulating specific educational policies that included the cultural rights of indigenous peoples. DO62 is the main educational policy that embodies the interface of perspectives.

DO62 reflects the following interface points:

- a. The right of indigenous communities to culture-responsive quality education;
- b. The right of indigenous peoples to self-governance, specifically their right to participate in all levels of decision-making (Section 16, IPRA) as their exercise of participation in national development.

DO62 considers “...education as a necessary means to realize other human rights and fundamental freedoms...”<sup>7</sup> **One can see that the recognition of rights of indigenous communities strongly influenced DO62’s formulation.**

DO62 is also “intended to be an instrument for promoting shared accountability, continuous dialogue, engagement, and partnership among government, IP [indigenous peoples] communities, civil society, and other education stakeholders.” It provides that the Indigenous Peoples Education Program should subscribe to the “rights-based approach which gives primary importance to the principles of participation, inclusion, and empowerment.”<sup>8</sup> These provisions of DO62 implement the right of indigenous peoples to self-governance under IPRA.

The main policy statements of DO62 are comprised of a short introductory statement and seven policy statements on the major areas of the national education system:

- Access to education services;
- Pedagogy, content and assessment;
- Learning facilities and environment;
- Teachers and learning facilitators;
- Institutional support for the indigenous peoples education program;
- Linkage and partnership for indigenous peoples education; and
- Eradication of discrimination.

The short introductory statement provides another set of interface of perspectives as shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Perspective Interfaces**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Recognize the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination</p> <p>Recognize the right of indigenous peoples to participate in national development</p> <p>Recognize the right of indigenous peoples to an education appropriate to their culture, aspirations, and needs</p> <p>The main goal of education should be to enable indigenous children and youth to contribute to the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples rights and welfare</p>	<p>Inclusive basic education in the context of indigenous children and youth means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A national education system that recognizes, protects and promotes the rights and welfare of indigenous peoples</li> <li>• Educational interventions are to be developed in consultation with indigenous peoples</li> <li>• Inclusion of indigenous peoples' history, culture, identity and worldview in the national education system</li> </ul>	<p>Provision of inclusive basic education for all</p>

The succeeding specific policies provide other points of interface of perspectives.

**Access to education services**

Policy: “Ensure the provision of universal and equitable access of all IPs [Indigenous Peoples] to quality and relevant basic education services

towards functional literacy for all.” Table 2 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

**Table 2. Access to Education**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Recognize the right of indigenous peoples to access to education</p> <p>Recognize and support community-based educational initiatives</p>	<p>Universal and equitable access of all Indigenous peoples to quality and relevant basic education services towards functional literacy for all</p> <p>Partnership between the government and the civil society and private sector organizations in the provision of universal and equitable access to formal and alternative forms of education</p> <p>Both supply- and demand-side interventions shall be expanded and diversified as needed</p>	<p>Provision of accessible education for all students in the Philippines towards functional literacy for all through the formal school system and the Alternative Learning System</p> <p>Inclusion of relevant data regarding indigenous children and youth that can serve as basis for policy formulation for indigenous peoples education</p>

It is notable that the access to education provision is not the usual build more schools or strengthen the advocacy for indigenous children to enroll policy. Rather, the **policy statement highlights quality and relevant basic education**, further defined as culture-responsive education. It further stresses that the “demand-side,” which means community-initiated interventions, are to be given as much attention as those that are generated by the “supply-side” or the DepEd.

The education programs and initiatives done by indigenous communities over the previous decades are concrete examples of effort to address the concern of this policy statement from the “demand side.” In most instances, these programs and initiatives are in places where DepEd has not yet extended its services. These initiatives also address the quality dimension and not just increased enrollment dimension of education.

Based on the research conducted by the Indigenous Peoples Education Office of DepEd, the earliest community-based initiative that attempted to address distance and education quality concerns of indigenous communities is the Ikalahan Academy in Imugan, Santa Fe, Nueva Viscaya province in northern Philippines. It was established by the Kalanguya community in

1974 in response to their negative assessment of experience with what they called “lowland education.” In the 1970s, the distance of the nearest schools from their communities required indigenous secondary school students to live away from their families. The members of the Kalanguya community noticed that their youth started to acquire habits and practices that were contrary to the community’s values. **They also observed rampant acts of discrimination against their young students.**

In response, the Kalanguya community decided to establish their own school with a curriculum that incorporated the community’s cultural context. Having been recognized by the DepEd as a private school, the Ikalahan Academy is now entering its fifth decade of operations.<sup>9</sup>

While Ikalahan Academy met the recognition criteria of DepEd, many other indigenous education programs in the country failed to meet the criteria that were inapplicable or inappropriate to the context and situation of the **indigenous communities. Specifications on school buildings, for example,** were based on structures for lowland areas and not for structures built in the uplands or interior mountain areas. The requirement for land title of the school site could not apply to schools within the ancestral domain where right to land was a different concept from that of prevailing private real property concept. There was also a tendency to view the curriculum of these initiatives as non-compliant with the national curriculum because of the inclusion of topics related to the community’s culture (e.g., customary law and local history) and **curriculum modifications to reflect the perspective and worldview of the community.**

The lack of DepEd recognition of these indigenous educational initiatives led government-approved schools to refuse to acknowledge the educational attainment of indigenous transferees for higher year level and thus were forced to start again from Grade 1.

In response to this situation and as a major step to actualize the access to education policy statement, DepEd issued DO21, s. 2014 that specifies the appropriate criteria for evaluating the various aspects of schools in indigenous communities, and provides clear procedures for applying such criteria. As a result, forty-eight indigenous schools from different parts of the country have been recognized as of July 2014, most of them providing primary school services in areas not reached by DepEd.

### Pedagogy, content and assessment

Policy: “Adopt appropriate basic education pedagogy, content, and assessment through the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) in all learning areas and processes.” Table 3 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

**Table 3. Pedagogy, Content and Assessment**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Recognize the right of indigenous peoples to cultural integrity</p> <p>Recognize and include IKSPs as valid knowledge to be learned in the classroom</p> <p>Recognize ILS as the education systems of indigenous communities and their inclusion in the national education system</p>	<p>Actualization of the inclusion of IKSPs and ILS in the national education system through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integration of IKSPs and ILS in the national education system (indigenization of the curriculum including the teaching-learning process and learning assessment)</li> <li>• Strengthening of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) for indigenous students</li> <li>• Strengthening of alternative modes of delivery (ADMs) of basic education services, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA)</li> </ul>	<p>Implementation of culture-responsive education in the context of indigenous communities</p> <p>Implementation of MTB-MLE</p> <p>Provision of basic education services through alternative modes of delivery particularly in GIDA</p>

During the past fifteen years, the indigenous communities have been consistently asserting the inclusion of IKSPs and ILS in the content, teaching-learning process and learning assessment of indigenous children and youth. Since the 1970s, community-based initiatives have been attempting in various ways to interface the IKSPs and ILS with the national curriculum; resulting in a variety of curriculum modifications that were not recognized by DepEd. These curriculum modifications also integrated the indigenous peoples’ history and, later on, indigenous peoples’ rights. These curriculum enhancement efforts were known as indigenization of the education system.

A community-based initiative that can serve as an example of the interface of IKSPs, ILS and community learning assessment with the national curriculum is that of the Paaralang Mangyan na Angkop sa Kulturang Aalagaan or PAMANAKA (Mangyan School Appropriate to the Culture Being

Cared For).<sup>10</sup> PAMANAKA is an initiative of the indigenous communities of Occidental Mindoro province that started in 1998 and focused on secondary school education. The indigenous communities were hopeful that the PAMANAKA graduates would eventually finish college courses and become useful to their respective communities. The community leaders strongly wanted PAMANAKA to be culture-based in its curriculum and school management. With these directives, PAMANAKA from the very beginning explored the indigenization of the national curriculum. Over several years, PAMANAKA was able to enhance the national curriculum through the integration of community competencies in various topics, as well as the inclusion of the community teaching styles and forms of assessment. As much as possible, topics were scheduled and activities were designed according to the community's cultural life cycle to make learning practical and easily applicable. Storytelling was used as a teaching strategy when appropriate even in the science and mathematics subjects, with elders being prioritized as the storytellers. Learning assessment might include community members checking the output of learners since learning assessment was not limited to pencil and paper test and was in the context of community life and realities.

When PAMANAKA established a primary school in 2005, more radical innovations were undertaken. Hoping to be consistent with the ILS of the community, the primary curriculum was designed not according to subject areas; instead, community events were made the organizing elements of the curriculum, with the subject area competencies being integrated and related to community events for each month. In this way, the children's learning flowed fully with the life of the community, and the learning of subject areas became embedded in the community activities. This was a radical departure from the subject-based national formal school curriculum.

With DO62, enhancements of the curriculum to include IKSPs, ILS, community history and indigenous peoples' rights are now recognized. This directly actualizes the right of indigenous peoples to cultural integrity. As Table 3 above shows, the DepED mandate to provide culture-responsive education which, strictly speaking, covers all indigenous communities in the Philippines, is directly related to what the indigenous communities have been advocating for.

This is further supported by DO21, s. 2014 mentioned earlier which recognizes curriculum enhancements for as long as it is aligned with the standards of the national curriculum. The DepEd is also moving towards

adopting a national policy for the indigenization of the curriculum at the local level.

Hoping to instill culture-sensitivity in the teaching-learning process, DO51, s. 2014 titled “Guidelines on the Conduct of Activities and Use of Materials Involving Aspects of Indigenous Peoples Culture” was issued in December 2014 to guide teachers and school heads on holding cultural activities and/or use indigenous community artifacts, clothing and other materials in the process of indigenizing their lessons. These guidelines are anchored on the right of indigenous peoples to cultural integrity and the exercise of free, prior and informed consent.

### Learning facilities and environment

Policy: “Provide adequate and culturally-appropriate learning resources and environment to IP learners.” Table 4 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

**Table 4. Learning Facilities and Environment**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Construct infrastructures that are appropriate to the geographical location of the community</p> <p>Design learning spaces in ways attuned to the learning sensibility of indigenous children and youth</p> <p>Recognize the right of indigenous communities to cultural integrity through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of learning materials that are culturally-appropriate</li> <li>• Recognition of the community's collective ownership of its IKSPs</li> <li>• Recognition of the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC)</li> </ul>	<p>Recognition of the need for culturally-sensitive and geographically appropriate structures and learning environments/spaces</p> <p>Production of community-based and community-initiated education resources, including research materials that will serve as reference for curriculum development</p> <p>Recognition and upholding of community's communal intellectual property rights</p>	<p>Provision of classrooms and learning materials</p> <p>Provision of educational resources for teachers and students</p>

This policy statement addresses the concern for appropriate infrastructure and learning spaces, and the provision of education resources that are



culture-sensitive and as much as possible, generated by and with the community itself.

For community-based initiatives, the ancestral territory has always been considered the “classroom,” and learning spaces like the usual classroom were considered as just one of the venues for learning. Thus, classes were held in various parts of the community depending on the topic and the appropriateness to the lessons. The construction of classrooms, on the other hand, was largely determined by resources available, the terrain of the community, weather conditions, and cultural considerations.

While the government previously prescribed the building and campus ground specifications for all schools whether private or public with the intention of assuring quality facilities for students, the DepEd now recognizes cultural and geographical considerations in building structures in indigenous communities. Guided by this understanding, discussions are under way in the DepEd regarding additional designs that can be considered for public school structures to be constructed in the areas of indigenous communities. DO21, s. 2014 allows flexibility in the design of classrooms given the cultural and geographical conditions of community-based schools that are seeking recognition from the government.

With regards to educational resources, further steps are needed to comprehensively address this concern. As a start, DO51, s. 2014 provides some guidelines to assure that educational resources featuring the culture of indigenous communities (including writings/publications about them) undergo the proper process of consent-seeking, proper acknowledgement of the community/ies involved, and validation.

### **Teachers and learning facilitators**

Policy: “Strengthen the hiring, deployment, and continuous development of teachers and learning facilitators in the implementation of its IP Education Program.” Table 5 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

Table 5. Teachers and Learning Facilitators

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Support culture-responsive education through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignment of teachers who are from the area of the indigenous community and who know the culture of the indigenous children and youth</li> <li>• Adequate preparation of teachers who are to be assigned in indigenous peoples' areas</li> </ul> <p>Support indigenous peoples who are taking education courses so that they can have the needed qualifications to apply for teaching posts in DepED and hopefully, be assigned to their own community</p> <p>Inclusion of culture bearers and other community members in the teaching-learning process</p>	<p>Provision of the following to actualize the right to culture-responsive education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies and subsequent actions to look into teachers assigned to indigenous communities</li> <li>• Capacity-building of teachers before being fielded to indigenous communities and provision of incentives</li> <li>• Support for indigenous teachers who want to teach in their communities</li> <li>• Support for culture-bearers and community members as part of the teaching-learning process</li> </ul>	<p>Provision of teachers for all public schools</p> <p>Adequate preparation and capacity-building of teachers for their assignment</p> <p>Provision of adequate incentive for teachers teaching in far-flung areas</p>

Indigenous peoples consistently raise the point that the teacher is a key factor in the implementation of a culture-responsive education. It is not enough that an adequate number of qualified teachers are assigned to the school; what is crucial is that the teacher has the proper perspective and disposition to relate with indigenous children and youth and their community, and is adequately equipped to undertake the **indigenization of the curriculum** and the teaching-learning process.

One initiative that exemplifies a responsive effort to the concerns for capacity development of teachers is that of Mangyan Mission in the province of Oriental Mindoro. Mangyan Mission is a Catholic church-based non-governmental organization in Oriental Mindoro province committed to the concerns and welfare of the indigenous communities in that province. In tripartite partnership with the provincial government and the DepEd Division Office of Oriental Mindoro, Mangyan Mission has been involved since 2005 in a capacity-building program called Programang Pang-Edukasyon sa Kalibliban or PPSaKa (Education Program for the Hinterlands) which has

a training component for teachers assigned in public schools with indigenous students. **The partnership established by the three institutions is a pioneering initiative in the Philippines, and aims to provide teachers with the needed orientation and skills to effectively indigenize the teaching-learning process.** This advocacy of Mangyan Mission for capacity-**building of teachers** stemmed from the feedback of indigenous communities who were concerned about the cultural sensitivity of teachers in relation to indigenous students and the inclusion of the cultural context in the curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

With the issuance of DO62, DepEd since 2013 has organized trainings for teachers and school heads from schools serving indigenous children and youth to equip them with the competencies to indigenize the teaching-learning process. This training also includes sessions that experientially tackle the situation of indigenous peoples in the Philippines and their rights, the history of IPED and its legal bases. These topics are foundational to implementing the IPED Program.

This policy statement also recognizes the importance of community members as part of the teaching-learning process and opens the possibility of institutionalizing their involvement in this role at the school level. Having community members as co-facilitators and resource persons has been a regular practice of community-based education efforts and is considered as one key innovation of IPED.

In response to the concern regarding teachers assigned to schools with indigenous children and youth, the DepEd included in the guidelines for teacher hiring for school year 2015-2016 (DO5 s 2015) **the specific criteria regarding familiarity with the indigenous community's culture (e.g., capacity to speak the community language) and their preparedness in implementing indigenization process.**

### **Institutional support for the IP Education Program**

Policy: "Establish and strengthen appropriate multi-level units within DepEd responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring IP education[al] interventions." Table 6 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

**Table 6. Institutional Support for the Indigenous Peoples Education Program**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Establish an office that will specifically look into the needs of indigenous children and youth and education concerns of indigenous communities</p> <p>Inclusion of a budget specifically for IPed</p>	<p>Recognition of the need for institutional support for IPed in the form of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a program and an office mandated to operationalize the program</li> <li>• Setting up of a network of DepEd personnel assigned as point persons for the IPed Program</li> <li>• Provision of budget for the IPed Program</li> </ul>	<p>Establish needed mechanisms and processes to respond to the needs of students</p> <p>Provision of an office, personnel, and annual budget</p>

With the issuance of DO62, the DepEd immediately created a program and an office that support the assertions of indigenous peoples representatives regarding this concern. DO103, s. 2011 (December 2011) created the Indigenous Peoples Education Office (IPsEO). DepEd devoted 2012 to setting in place the needed institutional support for the national implementation of the IPed Program which included the following:

- a. Establishment of IPsEO's office and personnel;
- b. Appointment of focal persons for IPed in all the Regional and Division Offices to ensure that specific personnel of DepEd were in charge of the IPed Program at the local level; and
- c. Inclusion of an annual budget for the IPed Program in the General Appropriations for DepEd, assuring that it will have a regular budget from the national government.

Since 2013, all IPed focal persons have been undergoing capacity-building activities to ensure that they coordinate activities with the proper perspective and disposition in their own areas of jurisdiction. Foundational to their orientation was the discussion of indigenous peoples' rights and the rights-based approach as pillars in program implementation. Work in 2013 and 2014 focused on preparing the DepEd for school level implementation of the IPed Program, which is the main focus for 2015.

### **Linkage and partnership for IP Education**

Policy: "Expand and strengthen institutional and civil society linkages to ensure proper coordination, knowledge-sharing, and sustainability of the

IP Education Program.” Table 7 shows the points of interface of perspectives in the full policy statement.

**Table 7. Linkage and Partnership for the Indigenous Peoples Education**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Implementation of IPEd Program should involve indigenous communities to assure that its implementation especially at the local level is anchored on directions set by the community</p> <p>Linkage-building of DepEd to gather support for IPEd Program should be guided by considerations discussed with the community</p>	<p>Recognition of the right of indigenous communities to self-determination as seen in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous communities are the primary partners of DepEd in implementing IPEd Program</li> <li>• Establishment of mechanisms to institutionalize the partnership of DepEd with indigenous communities for IPEd Program</li> </ul>	<p>Establish partnerships and linkages for resource mobilization to support DepEd programs</p>

DepEd recognized, years before it identified IPEd as a key concern, that efforts on indigenous education in different parts of the country have been initiated by indigenous communities and their partners. It appreciated the experience of community-based initiatives in terms of indigenizing the curriculum and community-based management of an educational initiative such as IPEd. Thus, linkages and partnerships between these groups and DepEd are strongly encouraged in this policy statement.

Also, applying the rights-based approach, DepEd recognizes itself as the duty-bearer that should work with the rights-holders in IPEd as its partners. Thus the indigenous communities are the primary partners of DepEd. And agreements between DepEd (the duty-bearer) and the indigenous communities (the rights-holders) guide linkage-building efforts with other government agencies (co-duty bearers with DepEd).

To date, several indigenous communities have agreements with DepEd regarding the co-management of schools that were initiated by the community and turned-over to DepEd. The agreements include provisions on the continuing involvement of the community in school management, enhancement of the curriculum, and conduct of classes as appropriate. These types of management arrangement actualize the recognition of the right of indigenous communities to self-determination.

### Eradication of discrimination

Policy: “Implement stronger affirmative action to eradicate all forms of discrimination against IPs in the entire Philippine educational system.” The full policy statement has the following points of interface of perspectives:

**Table 8. Eradication of Discrimination**

Indigenous Communities	Perspective Interfaces	DepEd Mandate
<p>Recognize the right of indigenous communities to cultural integrity</p> <p>DepEd should address the various forms of discrimination in the education system</p>	<p>Recognition of the right indigenous communities to cultural integrity</p> <p>Affirmative action against discrimination which include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that textbooks, learning materials, and other learning resources have no contents that are discriminatory to or misrepresenting the indigenous peoples</li> <li>• Integrating in the curriculum the contribution of indigenous peoples to national history</li> <li>• Institutionalizing the recognition of cultural rights in general and the rights of indigenous peoples</li> </ul>	<p>Education for All</p> <p>Respect for the rights of all students</p> <p>Recognition of the diversity of students</p>

This policy statement communicates DepEd’s recognition that acts of discrimination against the cultures and identities of indigenous peoples have indeed happened and continue to happen within the Department, and that these contribute to the discriminatory view against indigenous peoples in the wider society. These discrimination experiences constitute one of the main reasons why indigenous children do not finish schooling. DepEd is equally conscious of its responsibility to change this perspective and mindset within the institution, and to advocate for the recognition of cultural rights in general and **indigenous peoples’ rights in particular to other duty-bearers**. These are the reasons for the inclusion of this particular policy statement in DO62.

Deepening the discourse on **indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation** of the IPED Program is one needed step to effect a change in perspective. The release of DO51, s. 2014, "Guidelines on the Conduct of Activities and Use of Materials Involving Aspects of Indigenous Peoples Culture" is a contribution in this direction. It was a direct response to the often-mentioned issue regarding the abuse and misuse of cultural artifacts and attire, and the inappropriate conduct or execution of cultural expressions (e.g., songs, dances, chants). Indigenous community representatives have pointed out that such acts have contributed to the wrong notions about indigenous peoples and their communities and a **misunderstanding of cultural practices**, leading to further prejudice and discrimination.

DO51 hopes to reverse this tide while instilling a consciousness for cultural sensitivity in the whole DepED. It specifies protocols for the following: conduct of cultural presentations, festivals and such type of activities; the use of community artifacts, clothing/attire and symbols; and, the production of publications, videos and related materials. It also applies in the ethical design of learning activities when tackling the culture of various indigenous communities.

### **Lessons Learned and the Road Ahead**

The discussion on the contents of DO62 shows the **critical role of identifying areas of interface of perspectives** in formulating a meaningful national policy framework for indigenous peoples' education. The interface points ensure that national educational policy would contain the perspective of indigenous peoples in education.

What facilitated the interface process and the identification of points of interface of perspectives leading to the adoption of the national educational policy? Several factors can be cited as reasons for this process.

First, DepEd officials met with the representatives of indigenous communities from all over the country in a series of consultations on the formulation of national educational policies for indigenous peoples. The indigenous communities view the DepEd with a degree of credibility despite their negative experiences with the DepEd's field offices.

Second, the indigenous communities, especially those with their own community-based education programs, **maintain a strong sense of custom-ary governance** that forms the basis of their assertion of self-determination.

Third, both DepEd and the indigenous communities have clear perspectives, views and core assertions on education for indigenous children and youth. Representatives of indigenous communities have been meeting since 2000 to reflect together and validate their collective understanding of education and iped. DepEd, on the other hand, was clear about its mandates and commitments.

Fourth, they listened with a sense of openness to each other's context and perspective. On the side of DepEd, it recognized its duty to uphold rights under the Constitution and laws. On the side of indigenous communities, their representatives were clear about their responsibility to assert their rights as indigenous peoples.

Fifth, they were willing to identify specific points of interface that led to innovations and other possibilities, while recognizing their limits and boundaries. One example is the inclusion of culture bearers and other community members in the teaching-learning process. While this is a concrete expression of interface, both parties were clear about the potentials, limits and possible concerns in implementing this idea. DepEd understood the value of community members being part of the teaching-learning process, particularly how their presence would contribute to the indigenization process, and thus agreed to this idea as a policy direction. However, DepEd clarified that given the existing government administrative system, the contribution of culture bearers and other community members would be remunerated differently from that of teachers, and this was not due to any discrimination against indigenous peoples. The community representatives, on the other hand, appreciated the openness of DepEd and recognized the situation as an issue they both have to continue to work on in the future.

Sixth, they considered the diversity of situations of indigenous communities and the right of each community to decide on issues at its own level. DepEd upheld the principle of shared governance that supported the localization of policies. Thus they agreed that while they formulated a national educational policy, it was not meant to be too specific that would prevent each indigenous community from making policy implementation plan suited to local context.

Finally, there was a growing openness on the side of DepEd to own and accept historical accountability for practices and policies that might have been inimical to the participation of indigenous children, youth and communities in the national education system in the past. This emerging clarity



of DepEd stance as an institution was recognized by the indigenous communities and contributed strongly to their willingness to engage DepEd in further discussions.

It is crucial that the understanding and practice of the interface process keep permeating the DO62 implementation so as to maintain the policy's grounding and sense of direction. The interface process has to be applied more at the community level where the policy implementation decisions have to be made.

The enactment of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10533) augurs well for the continued implementation of DO62 since the law gives premium to the cultural dimension of education and is anchored on EFA and MDGs. The law recognizes the importance of developing the capacity of students to engage various cultures within and outside the country and specifies cultural sensitivity as one of the standards of the curriculum. It also specifies indigenization of the curriculum at the school level as one of the curriculum standards, which directly supports the IPED Program. The law provides further grounding for DO62 implementation since the IPED Program is being articulated as a specific form of implementation of the recently enhanced basic education curriculum.

With DepEd's IPED Program moving towards school-level implementation starting this school year (2015-2016), actualizing the indigenous peoples' rights in education is slowly unfolding. And as long as the interface of perspectives continues to permeate the implementation of the IPED Program, there is hope that the indigenous peoples' rights in education will continue to unfold in the future.

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## Endnotes

1. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (Republic Act No. 8371) or IPRA has the following definition of indigenous peoples:

h) Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples - refer to a group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, or who have, through resistance to political, social and cultural inroads of colonization, non-indigenous religions and culture, became historically differentiated from the majority of Filipinos. ICCs/IPs shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains;

(Section 3. Definition of Terms) See <http://www.gov.ph/1997/10/29/republic-act-no-8371/>.

2. The full text of DO 62 is available at [www.deped.gov.ph/sites/default/files/order/2011/DO%20No.%2062%2C%20S.%202011.pdf](http://www.deped.gov.ph/sites/default/files/order/2011/DO%20No.%2062%2C%20S.%202011.pdf)

3. This list was compiled by the author based on the statements of indigenous leaders in many forums held through the years.

4. IPRA defines ancestral domains as follows:

a) Ancestral Domains - Subject to Section 56 hereof, refer to all areas generally belonging to ICCs/IPs comprising lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and natural resources therein, held under a claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs, themselves or through their ancestors, communally or individually since time immemorial, continuously to the present except when interrupted by war, force majeure or displacement by force, deceit, stealth or as a consequence of government projects or any other voluntary dealings entered into by government and private individuals, corporations, and which are necessary to ensure their economic, social and cultural welfare. It shall include ancestral land, forests, pasture, residential, agricultural, and other lands individually owned whether alienable and disposable or otherwise, hunting grounds, burial grounds, worship areas, bodies of water, mineral and other natural resources, and lands which may no longer be exclusively occupied by ICCs/IPs but from which they traditionally had access to for their subsistence and traditional activities, particularly the home ranges of ICCs/IPs who are still nomadic and/or shifting cultivators;

(Section 3. Definition of Terms)

5. Ironically, the resulting global education roadmap of the 2015 World Education Forum entitled "Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all" (Incheon Declaration) does not mention ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples, though it considers "cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity." See <https://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/incheon-declaration>, for the full text of the Incheon Declaration.

6. For the full text of the Department Order visit [www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-23-s-2010](http://www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-23-s-2010).

7. Armin Luis Castro, FSC, Adopting the National Indigenous Peoples (IP) Education Policy Framework, DepEd Order 62, s. 2011, 8 August 2011.

8. Ibid.

9. Presentation by Pastor Delbert Rice in the “Consultative Workshop on the Formulation of an IP Education Curriculum Framework,” Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, 11-15 March 2013.

10. Presentation by Sr. Aristeo Bautista and Catherine Sanchez-Escalona in the “Consultative Workshop on the Formulation of an IP Education Curriculum Framework,” Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, 11-15 March 2013.

11. Interview of Teresita J. Bunglay, Education Program Coordinator, Mangyan Mission, 4 June 2015.