

Diverse Voices and Initiatives: Reducing the Gaps of Women Invisibility with Their Contribution to Managing Protected Areas

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the roles of women in protected area management across selected sectoral stakeholders' organizations involved in the protected area management of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park, Bukidnon, Philippines. Using a qualitative descriptive study design with key informant interviews, the results revealed that women played multi-faceted roles in different sectoral stakeholders' organizations that were operating in the interest of the park management. They serve as administrators, local barangay executives, capability and network builders, forest guards, mediators, and knowledge holders. They take initiatives or participate in conservation efforts in the communities, supporting park management and producing positive conservation outcomes. This study, therefore, concludes that women matter in protected area governance. It implies that to strengthen inclusive governance, women should not only be recognized but also be included in the management system processes of protected areas.

Keywords: Women Roles and Contribution, Conservation and Protected Area management

INTRODUCTION

Protected area management functions as the practical implementation of protected area governance. Its main role is to safeguard and promote the sustainable utilization of natural resources and conserve biodiversity, encompassing both terrestrial and marine ecosystems (Dudley, 2008). Recent management approaches have involved multiple stakeholders from various sectoral organizations, such as government agencies, local communities, and private and nonprofit organizations, to work together to ensure sustainable conservation and protection. Local stakeholders, particularly women, are recognized as having a significant role because they are directly affected by any changes in the protected areas (Adam & Hulme, 2001).

Recently, women have gained acknowledgement as having a crucial role in conservation, whether as direct users or managers of surrounding natural resources. Their participation in environmental governance has produced better outcomes (Agarwal, 2009; James et al., 2021). However, women's roles in multi-stakeholder sectoral organizations in protected area management remain invisible. In recent studies, women's role in forest conservation has often been treated as homogeneous, failing to realize the work they do within sectoral organizations. As a result, there is a need to describe a context-specific role of women in the multi-stakeholder organizational governance setting of protected areas. Bypassing the roles women play in sectoral organizations will lead to failure to understand the role of women in various sectoral institutions.

The local context of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park (MKRNP) poses a challenge to women's participation due to its multi-stakeholder governance practice. Located in the province of Bukidnon, MKRNP was declared a protected area by virtue of RA # 8978. Its ecological services are very significant to the people of Bukidnon and the neighboring provinces of northern Mindanao. It is home to Indigenous Peoples and tenured migrants and is significant to their very survival. The MKRNP is managed by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB), which is composed of various stakeholders from government agencies, local government units, Indigenous communities, and private and non-profit organizations. Accordingly, Mt. Kitanglad had been the most successfully managed protected area in the Philippines (Parr, 2012). Despite the recognition of being well-managed, there is incongruence in terms of women's participation, remaining hidden and marginalized (Luna,

2015; Tena, 2015). This study therefore aims to determine the roles of women in protected area management across selected sectoral organizations involved in the protected area management of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive study design aimed at describing the roles of women in different sectoral organizations involved in protected area management. It captured the capabilities of women in contributing to protected area management based on their lived experiences. The study was conducted in Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park in Bukidnon, Philippines, among women who are leaders or members of stakeholder organizations represented in the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB). The respondents' sample was purposively selected from among the members of Mt. Kitanglad PAMB. There are 9 women and 5 male respondents selected from each stakeholder's organization, representing the PAMB. The respondents are selected because they are actively involved in the stakeholder's organization as a leader or member for a considerable period of time and are willing to participate in the study. The selected key informants directly perform roles and activities in relation to protecting and conserving the Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park.

A semi-structured interview guide was used for data gathering. It served as a guide for the researcher to ensure consistency while interviewing and to allow the participants to be at ease while describing their roles and experiences, ensuring that all the key points in the inquiry were covered. Follow-up questions were asked to elicit clearer responses. Except for the member of the academe who preferred a written response to the interview, all the other interviewees had face-to-face sessions. The interview was done in Visayan or mixed Visayan and English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. As for ethical considerations, the Free-Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC) was secured from both the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) of MKRNP and the communities to which the IP belongs. The PAMB issued a resolution to allow for the conduct of the study, while the IPs required a cleansing ritual. Before the interview with key informants, the consent of the respondents to participate in the study was solicited; the purpose of the study was discussed, and they were assured that all the shared information would be kept confidential. The use of code names was done to guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

A thematic analysis was used to analyze the gathered data. Recurring patterns related to women's roles were identified and categorized systematically based on the transcripts. The approach followed six phases, including transcribing and familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, refining the themes and defining the themes, and finally reporting (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The focus of the analysis is to describe data that reflect lived, real-world conditions rather than to develop a theory (Kim et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the study on the roles and contributions of women in the management of protected areas. Results revealed that women serve as leaders or members in stakeholders' organizations as administrators in a government agency, as local chief executives, as capability builders and researchers, as partnership builders and IP advocates, as overall chairpersons or members in the council of elders, and as members of the association of forest guard volunteers.

Women as Park Superintendent and Secretariat to the PAMB

In MKRNP, women in the government agency sector have also been promoted to higher positions, such as the Park Superintendent (PASu) officer. The PASu is mainly responsible for administrative and regulatory functions. The Protected Area Management Office (PAMO), headed by the Protected Area Superintendent (PASu), was established under Section 11B of RA 11053, whose primary function is to supervise the park management's daily operations. The PASu also acts as the secretariat of the PAMB and its "think tank." As described by key informant 1:

The PASu is the chief operating officer of the park, meaning he/she has to manage the park, enforce the law,

be the secretariat of the PAMB, and also be its think tank. Anything you do in the park will emanate from the PASu.” (Key Informant 1, Personal Interview, February 2, 2025)

Being accountable to the PAMB and DENR, the PASu has administrative duties to manage the daily operations, serve as the secretariat to PAMB, coordinate with other government agencies, academic institutions, local communities, NGOs, and other private sectors, document and report on the implementation of management activities, maintain a database system, secure resources, and plan to ensure competent management of the protected area. On the other hand, the regulatory duties of PASu concentrate more on enforcing laws and regulations, recommending policies to the PAMB, issuing permits for resource use and tourist entry, and regularly monitoring the protected area. PASu imposed these restrictions with the Bantay Lasang staff supported by the local government units and the deputized forest guards, the Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGVs). A key informant also shared that the PASu has to ensure the maintenance of stakeholders’ collaboration for successful management outcomes.

This finding demonstrates that women serving as administrators in a complex government agency such as PAMO have been assigned responsibilities to facilitate the effective management operation, decrease organizational risk, take the initiative to improve operations, and solve simple and complex problems. Literature suggests that leadership skills needed in both compliance and operations management are not gender-specific (Isnaini et al., 2023). But women who led an organization that has traditionally been male-dominated have defied this type of stereotype and broken structural barriers, laying the groundwork for meaningful participation in governance. This finding suggests that women contributed to protected area management not only in a supporting role but also as prime movers, increasing management effectiveness and accomplishing successful operations.

Women as Barangay Local Executives

Women who were elected during the barangay elections serve as barangay executives and have an important role in the conservation of Mt. Kitanglad. A barangay is the smallest political subdivision of cities and municipalities in the Philippines. Under Section 389 of the RA 7681, or Local Government Code of 1991, the barangay captain has powers and functions to implement the laws and ordinances, call a constituents’ assembly, preside over barangay legislative sessions, administer barangay justice, ensure peace and order, ensure essential delivery of social welfare services, appoint barangay treasurer, secretary, and other officials, prepare an annual budget, approve vouchers for disbursement, organize and lead an emergency group, supervise the activities of Sangguniang Kabataan, regulate pollution, promote protection and conservation for the environment, and exercise power and perform duties and functions as may be prescribed by the law.

MKRNP is surrounded by twenty-eight (28) barangays where barangay captains or chief executives automatically become ex officio members of PAMB. Out of 28 elected barangay captains, 25, or 89%, are male, and only 3, or 11%, are female, who won the recent election based on the list of stakeholders. By holding the chief executive position, a barangay captain serves as a member of the PAMB. His/her role in local governance is relevant to the conservation efforts. As the key component of PAMB, the barangay not only contributes to the local policymaking process and formulation but also implements and enforces NIPAS laws and other related environmental policies.

“Whatever is the law in Kitanglad, we also follow it in the barangay. It is the same.”

- Key Informant 4, personal communication, September 9, 2024

The key informants shared that, as a barangay captain, she closely works with the Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGVs) deputized by the DENR to patrol and monitor the protected area. The barangay captains also coordinate with law enforcement agencies like the Philippine National Police (PNP) or the Department of National Defense (DND) to resolve illegal activities in the area. Another key informant further noted that her role as barangay captain includes solving, mediating, or negotiating conflicts between their constituents and the DENR in relation to illegal activities in the protected areas. She also relates to holding barangay assemblies following the mandate of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), reminding constituents of the laws and regulations of MKRNP-protected zones.

“We made sure to give 'it' time to be discussed in an assembly meeting (barangay). Our barangay has an assembly meeting twice a year, following the law set by the DILG. Whenever there is an assembly, we have to remind the constituents to cooperate with us. Each of us has to ensure not to disturb what is inside Mt. Kitanglad. The assembly is for all the residents of the barangay.”

Key Informant 4, personal communication, September 9, 2024.

The findings revealed that barangays located near or within buffer zones of MKRNP are the direct line of defense against illegal activities. Particularly, women as local leaders prioritized forest biodiversity awareness as their main management agenda, educating constituents on environmental issues and relevant regulatory laws. Community awareness is significant in changing the behavior of its barangay constituents. Broader literature suggests that without the awareness and support of local communities, protection and enforcement will be more challenging, leading to limited impact, as compliance often relies on community participation (Alviola, 2025). This highlights that women leaders' emphasis on educating the locals on conservation and protection issues helps strengthen local support and compliance. It therefore suggests that women in local executive position have contributed to protected area management through the efforts of educating the local public and promoting conservation stewardship.

Women as Capability Builder and Researcher

Women from academic institutions in Bukidnon have played a crucial role in protected area management. This is demonstrated in MKRNP, wherein a woman PAMB member from the academe has largely contributed to research, education, policy support, and extension to protected area goals. The key informant noted this in her written statement:

“Bukidnon State University (BukSU) in Malaybalay City is a longtime member of the PAMB, whose initiatives contributed to the sustainable management of MKRNP. Our engagements are aligned with the goals of the PAMB, which include academic research, policy support, community training, and environmental education. We also enhance decision-making through data-driven lenses on protected area governance.”

(Key Informant 5, personal written communication, April 23, 2025)

Under the leadership of a woman, one of the university's priorities is to capacitate both stakeholders and communities through education and research. They provide environmental education and skills training, and research for policy improvements. They engage local communities surrounding the park by conducting trainings, workshops, and extension activities that are meant to improve livelihoods and technical science-based knowledge to support conservation efforts. Livelihood and skills training were conducted mostly to enhance the knowledge of the Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGVs) and the Council of Elders (COEs). Their membership in the PAMB reflects the institution's longstanding commitment to Mt. Kitanglad conservation and cultural heritage preservation.

This finding reveals that academic institutions under women's leadership play a crucial role in protected area management through capability building and provision of science-based data for planning and management. Broader studies suggest that the activities conducted reflect how the academe actively stimulates and accelerates positive change in conservation and environmental management (Buzzao et al., 2024). Research, most particularly, provides evidence-based data that informs management strategies and addresses ecological challenges that enhance the overall management outcomes (Horan, 2022). In context, integrating conservation into academic priorities helps bridge science, policy, and community action. Women's leadership in the academe made conservation in MKRNP one of its priorities, which basically strengthens the institution's role in education, research, extension, and policy support for park management. This demonstrates that female leadership in academic institutions has contributed to deepening the commitment to park conservation through policy research, engagement with grassroots communities, and improvement in livelihood and technical conservation capabilities.

Women as Partnership Builder and IP Advocate

Another notable role of women is their affiliation with NGOs. In Kitanglad PAMB, there are at least five (5) NGO representatives, of whom only one is a woman, the executive director of Kitanglad Integrated NGO's (KIN). Since its founding in 1995, KIN has been vital in managing MKRNP. KIN is a consortium of six (6) NGOs and people's organizations advocating for the environment. For the last 30 years, KIN has been crucial in enhancing IP participation in MKRNP, and its involvement has been influential in achieving the collaborative objectives of protected area management. KIN was selected as the host NGO of the NIPAS 1992 implementation under the Conservation Priority Protected Areas Project (CPPAP) in 1999. CPPAP was a project funded by the World Bank whose main objective was to assist the government in designing a protected area system to conserve the nation's biodiversity. Focusing on the 10 selected priority sites around the Philippines, CPPAP was tasked with improving the structure of protected area management, establishing funding mechanisms, confirming the tenure of IP communities, and developing sustainable forms of livelihood consistent with biodiversity conservation (Canoy, 2005).

One of the primary goals of KIN is to resolve conflicts among groups on resource use at the site level by shifting to a decentralized management system (Canoy, 2005). CPPAP has four project components designed to establish an efficient and sustainable management program for PAs (KIN report, 2002). It requires substantial support from both the government and the NGOs. Since then, KIN has worked for MKRNP, complementing DENR in its task to achieve the conservation goal. They have mobilized marginalized communities into more or less 76 people's organizations, which include women's groups, particularly tribal women. Their community engagement is extended to support community capability building for improving household income through non-destructive livelihood training, reducing health risk, and facilitating access to education among IP children and youth. They also support community efforts in securing ancestral domain tenurial security of the Bukidnon tribe of Daraghuyan while empowering their Council of Elders. KIN's advocacy for empowering Indigenous peoples led them to assume the bridging role or partnership builder. They bridge the gap of understanding between IP communities and the government sector while also building partnerships with external entities, either for the exchange of knowledge and culture or for funding resources.

"I think we have an edge since mayors listen to us since we know the dynamics of the community since we were there first. If you don't know the community, the mayors will not listen to you. And besides, if you are not a winning person for the DENR and PAMB, I don't think they will listen to you. So I think that role is to bridge that kind of relationship; it has to start in the building of trust. And I think in anthropology it is basic in our field to build trust from the community."

-Key Informant 2, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024

KIN was instrumental in building trust and understanding among major stakeholders to cooperate in MKRNP management, finding ways to balance traditional knowledge and modern systems. Their cultural approach to bridging partners and stakeholders recognized the vital role of Indigenous People in managing the Kitanglad protected area.

"Your consciousness is to temper yourself. You should not be seen angry since you are the bridge. I'm really conscious not to side with anybody. It's not possible that I have to side with Bae or the 3 tribes. It's not possible that I side with one barangay since there are 21 barangays. And there are 8 LGU municipalities."

-Key Informant 2, Personal Communication, August 29, 2024

After the World Bank CPPAP projects, KIN, with a long-time woman leader, became part of PAMB and an adviser/consultant to the PASu. They have bridged various activities, such as cross-visits to other sites, bringing PAMB members to other protected area sites in the Philippines and Asia. Aside from that, they empower indigenous communities by building capacities for socio-economic development, such as implementing projects on non-destructive livelihoods, creating educational opportunities for the youth, establishing partnerships with funding agencies, and doing cultural and 3D mapping. The 3D mapping helps create maps that are culturally appropriate, marking sacred sites, wildlife sanctuaries, and cultural boundaries. The map was useful to both PAMB and IP communities; it not only produced a physical 3D map but also recognized the rights of IP communities and their relationship to MKRNP. This cultural approach of community organizing created a bond

where various stakeholders understand the value of what they are protecting. The cultural approach to bridging was useful not only for collaboration among stakeholders but also for the integration of cultural practices into the protected areas management process.

The findings reveal that women from NGOS are actively involved in bridging the parks' stakeholders and external networks and imply that women as bridgers usually combine community engagement, collaborative leadership, and inclusive communication, which are crucial for the management of protected areas where many groups must work together. This confirms broader literature that an NGO's bridging role has facilitated trust, which is relevant for all stakeholders to meaningfully engage with one another, foster acceptance, collaborate in conservation initiatives, and have informed decision-making (White et al., 2022; Berkes, 2009; Berdej & Armitage, 2016). In a protected area management context, a bridging role is important to foster understanding and minimize conflict among various stakeholders in collaborative governance. The bridging role of women, therefore, helped strengthen collaboration among multi-stakeholder groups in protected areas for them to work together for conservation.

Women as Deputized Forest Guards

Women in Kitanglad communities are also instrumental in the implementation of regulatory activities and enforcement, being members of Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGV afterward).

"However, even if we are women, I also joined with men (on patrolling duty), particularly when we needed to see something. There was one time that we needed to investigate with CENRO Valencia; I was the only woman who went with them. I did not ask my fellow women (KGV members) anymore since I was in the barangay office. They can easily call me in."

– (Key Informant 10, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025)

The Kitanglad Guard Volunteers (KGV) is an association whose members provide free enforcement services to protect MKRNP from illegal activities. They were deputized by the DENR to serve as forest guards. Under the agreement with PAMB–PASU, KGVs provide regular patrolling at least twice (2) a month, report violations or illegal activities, monitor biodiversity, conduct risk and rescue operations, establish fire lines and boundary zoning, create checkpoints in the buffer zone when necessary, and submit an annual report.

"Patrolling is really OK because it helps us monitor them. Besides, ever since, there has been no major conflict here. No one cut trees even in the release area. They are afraid. This is very effective."

- Key informant 9, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025

Another service offered by the KGV is the Information Education Campaign (IEC), in which they tell their community populace about the significance of safeguarding MKRNP by disseminating information about the regulation and other activities.

"Informing people is also a method. We do not go house to house to visit. Even before everyone knows about the rules, that's why they do it less and less."

- Key Informant 10, Personal Communication, February 2, 2025)

In addition, they initiate tree-planting activities, conduct meetings, conduct search-and-rescue missions, and resolve conflicts related to forest protection within the community. It means that the majority of KGV's services are essential to park protection. KGVs are the "eyes and ears" in the forest. At present the number of KGV members has reached up to 400, with very few women. Endorsements from barangay chieftains, mayors, and the PAMB validated their position as forest guardians. KGV members are familiar with the mountain terrain and acquainted with the local populace. The organization mainly fills the gap in the number of forest enforcement personnel in MKFRNP. The provincial and municipal LGUs then offered honoraria to encourage the KGVs, although women key informants noted that it was not their reason for their voluntary membership, but rather for

forest protection. Women key informants believe that as members of the volunteer organization, their major responsibility is to protect the mountains to support the goals of the management rather than for the honorarium. Male key informants also shared that women were more useful as on-the-ground mediators due to regulatory conflicts, particularly in actual enforcement activities.

“In our experience, we did not regret having women KGVs in Imbayao. We have 3 women members. During a patrol, we came across illegal loggers. Then, we let the women speak to them, because if it's men, they would immediately become aggressive. Then, the women would explain the regulations and the consequences of their illegal actions. And in line with decisions, during our meetings, it is better to have the presence of women. They are natural mediators; they calm down tensions.”

- Key Informant 16, personal communication, February 19, 2025

These findings revealed that even though regular patrolling and forest monitoring are perceived as male-oriented jobs, women, as members of volunteer forest guards, performed regular patrolling and forest monitoring. Results also showed that women, as members of enforcement, excelled in the mediation of conflicts encountered during monitoring. Broader literature suggests that women's ability in mediation is derivative of their motherly and caring instincts (Shiva, 2009). They are peacemakers by nature; that is why women are better at resolving aggressive confrontations than men. Similar studies confirmed that the presence of women in formal and informal settings can increase cooperation and resolve conflict easily (Hendrastiti & Kusdinar, 2019). In the context of managing protected areas, mediation is important to resolve conflicts peacefully and prevent them from escalating. These results indicate that women in enforcement have contributed to the decline of unlawful activities in Mt. Kitanglad park management, helped resolve disputes, and promoted compliance and cooperation of local communities, suggesting the need to increase the number of members in enforcement, which has remained male-dominated.

Women as Head and Members of the Council of Elders

In MKRNP, the Council of Elders (COE) is the bearer of traditional knowledge. It is constituted of community chieftains, ritualists, and cultural brokers who bridge understanding across cultures. In the country, both laws, the NIPAS of 1992 and E-NIPAS of 2018, have institutionalized the participation of the Council of Elders (COE) of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park through PAMB membership. For PAMB Kitanglad, the role of COE is significant in making informed decisions, planning, resource use, and enforcement. As the holders of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices, they serve as advisers and experts on customary laws. They also resolve conflicts between themselves or other groups through traditional means. They are the source of information for their communities and discuss matters with their constituents. They are the voice of IP communities in the MKRNP management. They are responsible for reviewing and endorsing projects entering their communities. The COE is instrumental in harmonizing both cultural and government laws in MKRNP.

“My responsibility is to look into the issues of the Indigenous Peoples that surround Mt. Kitanglad. The problems that needed to be solved. So that IPs will be at peace. Since I ‘am the chair (referring to COE) in Mt. Kitanglad, it is essential that those (IPs) that have issues in their territories need to be resolved.”

- Key Informant 3, personal communication, August 29, 2024

Indigenous people, in general, have a very intimate connection to nature. Mt. Kitanglad is a cultural space where they articulate their everyday existence. It is their sacred space, and their very life depends on it. For the IPs protecting Mt. Kitanglad ranges, it means protecting their sacred spaces and the foundation of their tribal identity. Leadership for the tribe revolves around this “nature–culture” concept.

“The next role is to protect nature. First, protect the people, and now protect nature. To protect Mt. Kitanglad is to protect the sacred spaces of our ancestors. This (tradition) should be continued to avert typhoons, earthquakes, and other disturbances in the mountains.”

- Key Informant 3, personal communication, August 29, 2024

Because of this, the proactive tribal leaders are involved in their communities. As to leadership, in the Bukidnon cultural concept, men and women can become IP leaders. Male leaders are called Datu, and women leaders are called Bae. IPs' highest leader is called a Bae or Datu, their tribal chieftain. Being a Datu and Bae depends on their cultural abilities and knowledge of Indigenous systems. At present, there are only two (2) Baes out of 11 COE members of PAMB; one of them is the overall chairperson of COE, a Bae from the Bukidnon tribe. Bae, or woman tribal chief, like a Datu, performs various roles in the community. A Bae can be a Baylan (shaman), healer, mediator/arbitrator, historian, teacher, or chanter. By being a Bae, her network goes beyond her tribal community. A Bae key informant, for example, was appointed as the tribal chieftain of Barangay Dalwangan and was elected as IP Mandatory Representative (IPMR) also in Dalwangan for 9 years as endorsed by the Barangay Council of Elders (COE) and Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of Malaybalay City. At the same time, she was also chosen as one of the Bukidnon tribes' IP representatives to the board in MKRNP, wherein she has served for more than 20 years.

A key informant also relates a story of dependence of their cultural heritage on development projects and programs of a government agency that are not culturally appropriate. It was when the first PASu of MKRNP visited their area in Daraghuyan. The Daraghuyan area is one of the Bukidnon tribe's sacred sites that prohibits visitors from outside, especially when they have not undergone a cleansing ritual. She narrated;

"When the Kitanglad was declared a protected area, we did not know. Then I heard that the DENR would come to visit the Daraghuyan area; I immediately called my colleagues and barricaded their path. When they arrived, I made them understand how sacred the Daraghuyan is and why they are not allowed to get in without the cleansing ritual. So, we are lucky that Sir understood. That is the reason why there is a cleansing ritual because that is part of our cultural laws. So, that's the time they were able to enter (the Daraghuyan). From that day onwards, for anyone who enters the mountain, the office will call me that there are visitors, and then we perform the ritual for them."

- Key Informant 3, personal communication, August 29, 2024

The said incident deepened the understanding of sacred spaces and how it is valuable to the Indigenous peoples living in or adjacent to the park's protected area. For the cultural groups living in the park, conservation is not only a biological concern but is also cultural. A woman key informant related how they pursued the ownership title of their clan's ancestral domain. The importance of ancestral domain ownership is to pursue the freedom to express their tribal identity within their territory and preserve their sacred spaces. Thus, even when the application for the ancestral domain title was institutionalized by the government, and regardless of challenges, the tribes chose to pursue the ownership title. For example, when the Bukidnon tribe of the Daraghuyan Ancestral Domain applied for the Certificate of the Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), their woman head claimant related that the process of the ancestral land title application was tedious and took them more or less 30 years (Galache, 2011). The head claimant, having the resilience and perseverance of a woman, was the first tribe in Mt. Kitanglad to have been granted the CADT.

The findings reveal that women, particularly from tribal communities, are also leaders and holders of cultural knowledge, the same as men. Broader studies confirmed that women as tribal leaders and knowledge holders in tribal communities surrounding MKRNP highlight the important role IP women play in conservation, managing sacred sites, and emphasizing their cultural significance (Sinthumule, 2022). In protected area management, indigenous knowledge holders are significant because they are custodians of ecological knowledge and sustainable resource management systems and practices rooted in their traditions. This result suggests that indigenous women, as traditional knowledge holders, served as an important resource that provided an understanding of local environmental conditions and informed appropriate cultural conservation activities.

Synthesis

The overall findings reveal that women are prominent leaders and active members of sectoral organizations where they perform diverse roles in relation to supporting the protected area management. Women in institutional sectors carry out roles as administrators, barangay local executives, capability and network builders, forest guards, mediators, and knowledge holders. Women also either initiate or participate in engaging

communities with conservation efforts, collaborate with other stakeholders, conduct trainings, organize or facilitate meetings, engage in forest regeneration, and mediate conflicts. These efforts are intended to contribute to the management of the park, producing better management outcomes, including strengthened community governance, improved compliance, culturally appropriate implementation and management, and improved stakeholder collaboration (see the table below). These findings supports broader perspectives in Gender and Development that women who are involved in the activities of their sectoral institutions are active participant in conservation efforts rather than just being passive beneficiaries in development process (Kurebuwa, 2022). In similar studies the role assigned to them and what the organization are expected of them have greatly influence how women participate in forest governance (Agarwal, 2010). Broader literature on gender also confirmed that involving women in natural resource management not only strengthen management on the ground but also strengthen gender inclusive governance (James et al., 2021).

Summary Table of Women's Role and Contribution to Protected Area Management

Sectoral Organizations	Women's Role	Activities conducted	Contribution to PA Management
Government Agency	Administrators/secretariat/regulatory	Daily office operation	Effective and efficient management
Local Government	Chief executive	Enact and implement conservation regulatory laws, community awareness activities	Strengthened community participation and compliance
Academe	Research and capability builders	Research, livelihood and technical trainings and workshops	Shared knowledge and socio-economic empowerment
Kitanglad Guard Volunteers	Forest guards	Localized forest monitoring, mediation of conflicts, submit reports	Resolve conflicts and reduction of illegal activities
NGOs	Partnership builders and IP advocate	Community organizing, networking, empowerment activities, cultural mapping	Strengthened stakeholders relationship and collaborative governance
Council of Elders	Knowledge holders	Leadership, conduct rituals, stewardship of ancestral domain, cultural knowledge resource,	Provide appropriate input to PA management and planning

However, results also showed that protected area governance remained male-dominated. Despite the Expanded-National Integrated Protected Area System (E-NIPAS) law mandating increased women's representation on the park board, women's representation in sectoral organizations remained low. This result suggests that, despite women being equally recognized as leaders and members of these organizations, their representation remains limited across sectoral groups, particularly in people's community organizations such as KGV (very few among 400 members) and the IPs Council of Elders. This evidence is similar to broader literature where women, despite facing various challenges, actively participated in natural resource management at various local communities, but they remain unrecognized and have fewer benefits (Tena, 2015; Luna et al., 2015; James et al., 2021; Bahl, 2022). This implies the need to develop mechanisms to recognized women contribution and lessen the barriers to their participation in protected area governance reflecting women agency and socio-structural changes.

CONCLUSION

The study found that women are involved in protected area management, and their contributions are multi-faceted rather than a single form of participation. Women as leaders or members of sectoral groups primarily

support management objectives through a range of activities that represent the conservation interests of their specific sector. Women's participation has contributed to producing improved management outcomes benefiting protected area governance. This study indicates that the integral role of women within a broader multi-stakeholder management collaborative framework is improving conservation outcomes, especially benefiting local communities. This implies a further reflection and recognition of women's agency and the significance of improving gender-inclusive approaches to all levels of the multi-stakeholder protected area governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conservation institutions, programs and projects should include community organizing for women at the ground level that responds to the realities of their daily lives.
- Sectoral organizations should be obliged to assess the situation of women on the ground and recognize their livelihood, socio-political, and cultural potential and opportunities.
- A comprehensive research on assessment of women and their participation, challenges and outcomes should be conducted while also indexing social norms for a possible change of patriarchal behavior.

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