



*Ritual during the ICCA declaration of the Obo Monuvu in Barangay Manobo, Magpet*

# Indigenous Knowledge, Systems, and Practices of the Obo Monuvu in Magpet, Cotabato, Philippines



Strengthening National Systems to Improve Governance and Management of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Conserved Areas and Territories (Philippine ICCA Project, Project ID No. 00096320 )

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Obo Monuvu of Don Panaca, Imamaling, and Manobo  
in the Municipality of Magpet, Cotabato

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When talking about governance, we generally refer to how a government creates, implements, and oversees policies and legislations over its constituents. Governance often refers to the institutions that create spaces and guidelines for individual actions. Fundamentally, governance is about how people organize themselves and undergo decision-making processes as a group (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2011).

Understanding governance is understanding how members of various groups or communities come up with and carry out decisions that influence the ways they live. And to realize how other groups may or may not influence each other's decisions is to understand the types of governance at work. Mikkel Berg-Nordlie divided the modes of governance into hierarchical, market, and network governance. The hierarchical mode of governance is when state structures exclusively control the decision-making processes. The market mode relies on a free interaction between market-based actors. And lastly, network governance is about the active involvement of civil society groups or private business players in policy formation (Berg-Nordlie 2015).

### **State Governance over Resources**

For many years, international environmental agreements were made under the assumption that nation-states are legitimate entities with the capacity and willingness to manage all the resources found within their territories (Peluso, 1993). The assumption has inadvertently reinforced the legitimacy of states to exercise control not just over resources but also over peoples living within the states' established territorial boundaries. That, in turn, has contributed to further disenfranchisement and marginalization of indigenous communities with traditional claims over resources (Peluso, 1993). Apart from that, the initial intent to preserve and conserve threatened species and environments also struggled against conflicting claims over resource management.

There are also instances when states have initiated 'development' efforts along with the implementation of their resource management programs. Illustrations of the protection of elephants in Kenya as well as the forests in Java were drawn in Nancy Lee Peluso's classic article on state resource control politics. There we see not just a picture of development alongside resource management of the state but also descriptions of how disregarding local political ecology and indigenous resource use can lead to ineffective conservation (Peluso, 1993).

When advocates and states saw the need to involve communities in natural resource management and conservation, there arose an image of a unified community that uses a set of local rules and norms (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). However, particularly because of a homogenized view on communities, some conservation approaches failed despite a supposed collaboration between the state and its peoples. In some cases, states exercised their legitimacy through a so-called "top-down territorialization" that they implement within community-based conservation programs where communal landscapes transform into exclusive conservation territories (Bluwstein & Lund, 2018). Territorialization or the means to implement projects that make use of territorial strategies in order to control spaces or territory, often to govern the movements of people and resources within that space, has been present in environment-development discourses (Bassett and Gautier 2014) all over the globe and particularly in developing countries.

To improve the efficacy of conservation initiatives, there is a need to understand social processes like decision-making and management and their role in social phenomena such as governance, cultures, and worldview (Bennett, et al., 2017). In time, international organizations that focus on protecting the environment and improving the management over it developed a growing commitment to promote

programs that support dialogues with various stakeholders particularly indigenous communities who maintain and exercise their customary rights over their ancestral domains (Walter & Hamilton, 2014).

In this study, we will look at how three Obo Monuvu-dominated barangays in the Municipality of Magpet come up with decisions that affect their ways of living – from movement within the areas, livelihood, and land access, use, and ownership. Though situated alongside each other, we will see how their modes of governance particularly on resource use differ depending on how the state has integrated itself into the everyday lives of today's indigenous peoples.

### **The Obo Monuvu of Magpet**

The Obo Monuvu is an indigenous cultural community that resides at the foothills of Mt. Apo. Just like other indigenous communities living along the Mt. Apo range, the Obo Monuvu regard *Apo Sandawa* as a sacred mountain where their ancestors prayed from a long time ago. It has been inculcated in their culture that Mt. Apo is an important part of their history as Obo Monuvu. Here, we look at Obo Monuvu communities living in ancestral domains in the Municipality of Magpet, three of which comprise or form part of Barangays Manobo, Imamaling, and Don Panaca.

The name Magpet came from the Manobo word *malotpot*, which refers to a place where people gather to eat lunch wrapped in banana leaves. Eventually people called the place *linoppot*, which shortened to maupot. Later, a forester mistakenly spelled it as magpet in his survey report. The name stuck on people's minds and soon after began to mean a place with verdant lands and countless waters.

With no connecting roads but only foot trails through the forests and grasslands, the Obo Monuvu moved about Magpet living their traditions and cultural beliefs. It was only in around 1935 when the first Christian settlers arrived. Led by a person named Dominador Apostol, the first team of Christians hired a Monuvu guide to bring them to a land where milk and honey flowed. In a forested area, the group founded a small village now known as the Poblacion of Magpet.

Ten years after the first settlement of Christians, the abaca industry began particularly in the neighboring barangays of Kidapawan. With just the right soil and climate, abaca fiber became in demand and was exported to Japan in large scales. The abaca industry grew just as the population of settlers increased. Economic and social changes eventually became evident in Magpet. The influx of migrants continued while the clearing of forested ancestral domains went on an increased rate. Magpet opened and transformed into a social center and trading station.

In around 1960, logging concessionaires also arrived in Magpet. Some of the notable logging companies that exploited the vast timberlands at the foot of Mt. Apo were Alcantara & Sons Incorporated, Diamond Timber Corporation, Bosquit Logging Company, and Rico Timber Enterprises. What once were mere foot trails, soon became wide logging roads that invited IPs and migrants into the labor force.

Despite the clearing of large portions of Magpet, regions of interconnected forested areas remained where indigenous peoples maintained their traditional practices. With ecologically significant regions intact, Magpet continues to harbor diverse flora and fauna. The speculation of the presence of diverse species persists due to the geographic location of Magpet, with its ancestral domains bordered by key biodiversity areas of Cotabato and Davao within the Mt. Apo Natural Park.

### ***Manobo***

Barangay Manobo, previously called Tico, is in between Barangays Bangkal and Kinarum to its west, Barangay Don Panaca to its north, the ancestral domains of the Obo Monuvu and Bagobo Klata of Davao Region to the east, and Mt. Apo to the south (Manobo 2018). Tico is a word in the local language used to describe the crooked creek that flows within the area. The name was later changed to “Manobo” by the former Captain the late Rolando M. Pelonio to signify that the barangay is a home to the community of the Obo Monuvu. Manobo was formed in 1969 through the guidance of Rolando Magyaw Pelonio and was later recognized as an official barangay of Magpet in 1972. The recognition of Manobo as a legitimate ancestral domain covering around 5,000 hectares occurred thirty-five years after when the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) awarded the Obo Monuvu in the area their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) No. R12-MAG-0909-139 in 2007.

Currently, Barangay Manobo has fourteen sitios where families are to tend two hectares of agricultural land each. Out of the fourteen sitios, five are within the protection area of the ancestral domain, which the Obo Monuvus declared in 2018 as an Indigenous Community Conserved Area. Through the Philippine ICCA Project, key informant interviews and a focus group discussion with leaders of the said sitios and a few neighboring ones were conducted to understand the system in place that affects the ways resources are governed within the domain.

### ***Don Panaca***

The name Don Panaca came from the local saying “*diyon to dowon daoon to abaca*,” which translates to the place where people would eat food wrapped in the leaves of a wild abaca while taking a break from farming or hunting. The barangay was said to be a hunting ground in the past due to the abundance of wildlife in the area. Through the years, and with the influx of migrants, the saying shortened to Don Panaca and has now become an official name of the barangay. Previously, like many places in Magpet, Don Panaca became one of the sites of a large logging concessionaire called Alcantara. That was during the time when Don Panaca was still a sitio of the adjacent Barangay Sallab. After its official recognition as a barangay, Don Panaca gained seven sitios covering 2,003.40 hectares and has only been awarded its Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title by the end of 2018.

Focus group discussions with the leaders, elders, women, and youth were conducted to understand the governance system in Don Panaca.

### ***Imamaling***

Together with Barangay Manobisa, Imamaling forms the ancestral domain under CADT R12-MAG-1108-088 awarded in 2006. With a total of around 5,163.10 hectares for the CADT, Imamaling has designated 400 hectares within its boundaries as their protection area while Manobisa also declared 655.70 hectares of their forests as such.

The Obo Monuvu in the barangay believe that Imamaling is the name of a woman who unfortunately disappeared while fishing by the river. The elders believe that the spirits took Imamaling away. The name then became a reference to the place where the woman got lost. Eventually, it stuck as the official name of the barangay.

## The Story of Pandi and the Philippine Eagle

Datu Ambit Agon of Barangay Don Panaca narrated the story of an Obo Monuvu and how his people built a relationship with the Philippine Eagle.

Pandi is an Obo Monuvu who lived by a forest now called Magpet, Cotabato. One day, while Pandi was walking along a river, a mighty eagle swooped down and snatched him from the ground. The eagle took Pandi to a very high cliff and was left on the nest as meal for two large eagle chicks. Pandi hid before the eaglets could get to him and he stayed by a big pile of branches that make up the nest. Upon discovering that there was nowhere for him to escape, Pandi decided to wait until the eaglets could learn to fly. To survive, he ate from whatever food was brought to the chicks while the parent eagles were away.

When the eaglets were ready to fly, he used one of the birds as an escape glider. Pandi and the young eagle landed safely. Eventually, Pandi tamed the bird and it became his pet. The bird also hunted food for Pandi and his family. But the bird left eventually and was reunited with its parents. When Pandi died, his coffin was hung midway up the cliff where the eagle nested. Since then the place was called Sooang Banog, which means “the eagle’s nesting place.” The cliff is found between what is now called Barangays Manobisa and Imamaling in the town of Magpet.

## History, Movements, and Landmarks

Unlike the often state-driven territorialization that the literature focuses on in general, we must remember that the production of territories can come from several players and various spaces (Bassett and Gautier 2014). Indigenous peoples have for years been creating territories according to their traditional governance systems and practices. As we can see in the case of the Obo Monuvu in Magpet, there are various factors that affect their movements and eventual space-making. And in the ancestral domains governed by Obo Monuvu communities within barangay boundaries lie different sacred places that serve as traditional landmarks with significant value to the history of the indigenous community in the area.

### ***Manobo***

Prior to the recognition of Manobo as a barangay, logging concessionaires have already entered the area. However, parts of then Tico remained intact with just a small number of Obo Monuvu population. Commonly mentioned in interviews in the sitios as well as in the neighboring communities is the role that Rolando Pelonio, Sr. played in the development of Tico into the barangay that it is now.

Around the time of rapid concession, Datu Aman Lino fled to Sitio Mollossu in Tico to avoid a criminal case against him. There, he lived with his wife until such a time when a young Rolando Pelonio, Sr. arrived at their house unexpectedly. The young man had cuts and was covered in dirt with flies buzzing around him. Datu Aman Lino decided against killing the young man when he introduced himself as Rolando Pelonio who had no recollection whatsoever of what happened to him except that he is from Mt. Apo. When Datu Aman Lino and his wife began providing food and shelter to Rolando Pelonio, other Obo Monuvu from the surrounding areas

heard the news of a young man from Mt. Apo and gathered together to live in what is now known as Manobo.

There is a certain reverence for Rolando Pelonio, Sr. of Mt. Apo as the Obo Monovu believe he was sent by Manama to guide them. After being baptized and adopted not just by the couple but by the community of Obo Monuvu in Manobo, Rolando Pelonio then became a Datu who helped the people arrive at decisions that would benefit them. People believe he had a gift of prophecy and could tell the good and bad that would befall the community. From then on, they listened to Datu Rolando Pelonio, who later became Chairman of the Barangay.

Barangay Chairman Rolando Pelonio then designated residential and agricultural areas as well as places deemed to be sacred and expanses where people could continue their traditional hunting practices. It was during his term that the fourteen sitios of Manobo came to be and people settled. In the years that followed, people moved about the barangay due to cultural beliefs, barangay resolutions, insurgency conflicts, and capitalist institutions.

Despite external factors, people recognized traditional landmarks and shared stories of their ancestral domain as they moved about it. One sitio had its name after a river that flows from the mountains and provides water to the sitios and lower parts of Manobo. The river Pontaron is said to be very sacred and women on their period are not allowed to wade into it in fear of “tainting” its purity.

Back then, only middle-aged people or the elderly could stay in Pontaron. It was only in 2004 when the youth could transfer and live in the sitio. In 2005, the influx of youth and the settling of families remained especially when a change in the sitio leader occurred. Though allowed to stay in the area, they are still expected to follow indigenous customs and practices that recognize the sanctity of the sitio. Up to this day, courtship is not allowed within the sitio. Giving birth is also prohibited, because the offspring is believed to die if born in the sitio.

There are two mountains that resemble twin siblings, the Matari. A mountain called Duhong, which locally means seven steps, has falls with seven ladder-like rocks before reaching its peak. It is believed that an elder left an important item, the Kamukaay, which when picked or disturbed, the Pontaron river will overflow and cause flood in the sitio. Both mountains are considered as sacred by the Obo Monuvu community.

In Elib, its people had a 25-year abaca contract with an attorney which ended last 2015. People also evacuated from the area due to an unfortunate encounter with the military. It was back in 1974 when several soldiers decided it would be entertaining to aim their guns at IPs who were running away from the scene. One of the lumad residents of Elib was shot on his arm, which had to be amputated eventually.

Amidst instances of evacuation due to the presence of armed conflicts, their lies in Sitio Elib the Banlawon River, which serves as the source of water in the barangay. Banlawon river is one of the biggest rivers in Manobo. Also in Elib, is a natural water system called the Sinupa that supplies most of the water needs in the barangay. Because of its vitality, harvest of hardwood and rattan is strictly prohibited in the area under indigenous policies.

Armed conflict encounters also occurred in another sitio, namely Kisimbit. There, the residents were caught in between insurgency and counter-insurgency operations by the New People's Army and the government forces respectively. Sitio Leader Manuel Serrano Bayoc, Sr. recalled that the encounters happened in 1987, 1989, 2014, and 2016. In each instance, people who lived in Sitio Kisimbit evacuated and stayed in the población. The latest armed conflict occurred in January 10, 2016 and since then most residents have not returned to the sitio until the time of interview in October 2017.

Sitio Dal'lag also faced a similar situation when back in 1977, a war ensued between the NPA and the Government. According to *sub kapitan* Omeles A. Agod, most residents in the area did not return to Dal'lag since then. Insurgency conflicts in the sitio became common then since it was already at the boundary of Davao Region and Magpet, with *Kol'lelan* or Mt. Talomo just beside it. Within Dal'lag is an area called Lantuwa, which refers to the indigenous way of cooking where fire is surrounded by rocks creating a makeshift stove. The area was named as such because it is surrounded by mountains looking like rocks around a fire. Once hunting grounds of their ancestors, the area later turned into a ritual place or a *panuvad-tuvaran*.

Contrary to the experiences in Kisimbit and Dal'lag, it was in Mahitang that Barangay Chairman Rolando Pelonio, Sr. asked sitio leader Arsenio Sicao to relocate. That was back in 1971, just two years after the establishment of Manobo as a barangay. The decision to have people live in Mahitang was likely due to the absence of armed conflicts in the sitio. However, despite a relatively peaceful situation, only six households were set up in the sitio as most people established farmlands instead of residential plots of land.

Originally called *Tutungaan* that translates to *utlanan* or boundary, Mahitang was said to be the location for a barter system in the past. The river in the sitio serves as a meeting area where people would exchange goods such as rice, sugar, and meat. One can also find the sacred landmark Panuwasan where the peak of the falls is located. According to elders, the place can give a sense of relief from tiredness and worries, which is the reason why people refer to the place as *binlanan*, or a place where one leaves something behind. The place is also home to various medicinal plants that only the *mananambal* can identify and use to heal a certain illness. As respect for the entities and spirits in the area, one must leave an offering upon entering its premises.

Along the tricky trails of the sitios in Manobo, a certain mountain called the Pamantawan can be seen. It is said that the mountain is sacred because of its height. At its peak, one can easily see the landscapes of the barangay. Another traditional landmark is called the Sas-sang, a rock structure that resembles a house. People visit the place to offer cigars, coins, and food as a sign of respect for the spirits living in the structure and in its vicinity.

More common than mountains and rock formations are protected places that in a way serve as landmarks. These protected places can be sacred places, hunting grounds, springs, falls, and forest covers. Included in the list of sacred places of Manobo are *Ponovaran to Langit-langit*, *Holy Place*, and *Ponuwos'san* in Sitio Mahitang. The hunting grounds in Manobo are *Mow'wag*, *Song'guyon*, *Lohiyaas*, *Sinupa*, *Mahitang*, *U'ot Pontaron*, and *Lovuntud to Novusung*. Protected springs are *No-ot'tiyan*, *Panganitan*, *Mol'lossu*, and *Apog-apog*. Also included in the protected places are the *Duhong*, *Elib*, and *Lowkuvan* falls. The protected forest cover in Barangay Manobo are in *Ponuwos'san*, Sitio Elib, Pontaron, Mahitang, and Dallag.

***Don Panaca***

In Don Panaca, a mountain called Mt. Uhis is considered as sacred. It is said that it has a mossy forest and the plants that grow in the area have white parts on it, which signifies that spirits and entities are present in the area. The Ngangag Mountain is also regarded as sacred, as it was said that when their ancestor pierced his spear on the mountain, a cry of pain can be heard, thus its name. The falls and other big bodies of water in Don Panaca is also considered sacred because it is believed that aside from providing drinking water to the place, these are also being guarded by the spirits.

According to elder Suzy Agad, a 64-year-old Obo Monuvu woman born in Barangay Sallab but grew up in Sitio Iglesia, Don Panaca was once a hunting ground for male Obo Monuvus. Assisted by their hunting dogs, hunters back then would divide the game amongst themselves after a successful hunt. Before, the most common games found in the area were wild boars, deer, and civet cats. These species were within what one would define as a communal area since, according to Suzy Agad, no one owns the hunting ground.

***Imamaling***

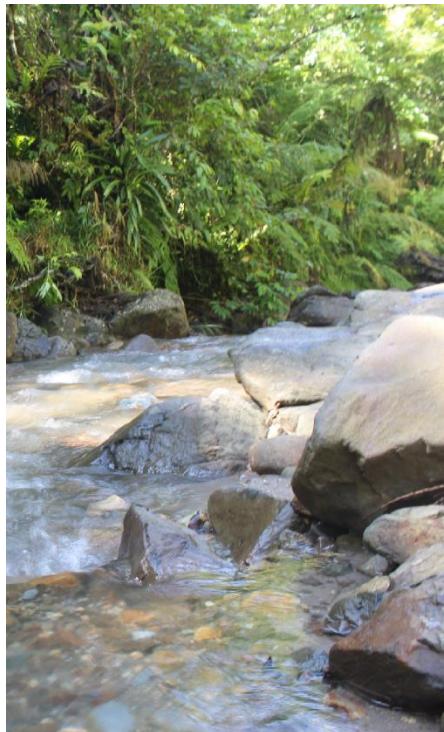
In Barangay Imamaling, a certain landmark is prominent, the Sooang Banog, which translates to “perch of the Eagle”. According to their folklore, Philippine Eagles in the past were huge that they can carry humans into their nest. One of their ancestors was carried by the eagle and was brought to the nest as a meal for the eaglet. However, the ancestor was able to hide in the nest and took care of the eaglet until it was able to fly. When the eaglet matured and was ready to leave its parents’ home, the eaglet brought their ancestor back to the village. Since then, the ancestor, as well as the rest of the people in that village, regarded the Philippine Eagle as a friend. Up until now, the people of Imamaling consider the Philippine Eagle as a sacred species.

The area has 2 main forestlands: natural grown forest and reforested area. The natural grown forest is where one can find wildlife, a hunting ground, and a sacred place where the Obo Monuvu do their rituals. The reforested area is planted with agricultural crops including Tahiti (Tiger grass) and harvestable trees like G-Melina, Falcata, and Mahogany.

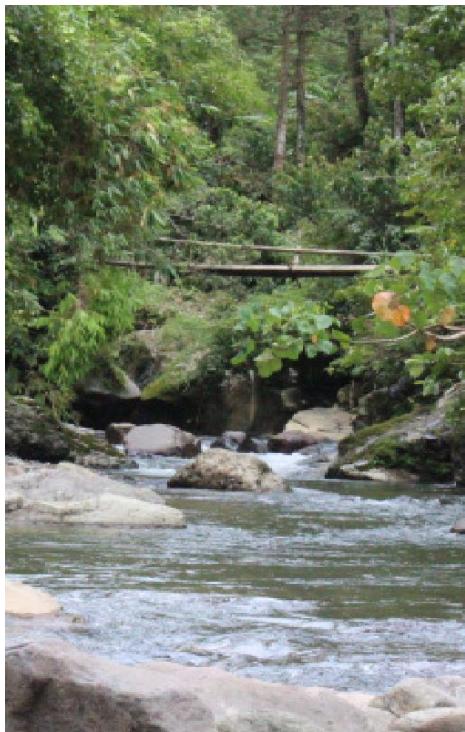
Imamaling also has a sitio called Kilapo, which is the name of the creek in an area where Datu Lapu once lived. Datu Lapu was then known for his strength. The sitio across Kilapo is Lang'gowoy, which is also the name of the creek in that place. The creek got its name from a villager who once lived there.

During the second World War, Imamaling became a place of refuge for Obo Monuvu who avoided the battles between the Japanese Army and the American and Filipino soldiers. In the 1960s, the Alcantara & Sons (ALSON) logging company arrived and harvested timber in Barangay Imamaling. A clash with the Obo Monuvu occurred as the company prevented them from cutting down trees for building their homes. In the 1970s, the Obo Monuvu in Imamaling were once again caught in between armed conflicts as the New People's Army (NPA) fought with government troops. A decade after, the DENR entered and established an Integrated Forest Management Agreement (IFMA) Project in the area. The establishment of IFMA ensued further conflict as the rights the Obo Monuvu to access and use the resources in their ancestral domain were restricted. In the 1990s, the Obo Monuvu applied for recognition of their ancestral

domain and CADC 141 and 057 were issued for Barangays Manobisa and Imamaling, who now share a single CADT.



Panginitan River, Manobo and Don Panaca boundary



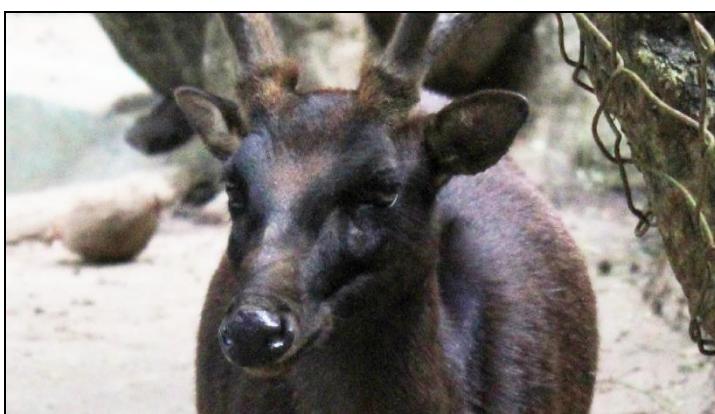
Banwasan River, Manobo



Holy Place, Manobo

### Cultural Keystones

The traditional landmarks and movements of the Obo Monuvu reflect an aspect of the Obo Monuvu culture. In these places where vast forests remain, is an abode for species with cultural significance to the community. These species are valued for either being a signifier for omens, reinforcement of spiritual beliefs, or source of food.



Binaw (Philippine Brown Deer)

Philippine Deer, wild pig, palm civet, shrew, frogs, monkeys, bats, and snakes were hunted and cooked for food. In the past, hunts were shared within the community even in small amounts, as the elders believed everyone should have a cut. However, due to different influences that came to the Obo Monuvu, hunting prey from the forests became a commercial industry. It is noteworthy



Almaciga Tree



Cinnamon Tree

however that at present, indigenous organizations have strict rules on hunting wild animals for sale, especially endangered species. The Obo Monuvu believe in limits to hunting prey, such as doing so for subsistence purposes only and not going after juveniles.

The Agoho tree, or Pine tree, was used as a charcoal by blacksmiths to forge weapons and farming tools using their traditional smithy, the sayaban. For the weapons, the body of the spear is made up of a Movaasag wood known for its sturdy properties. The sap of the Almaciga is highly flammable, similar with the Tanguile, which is why they were collected in the past to make fire.

For the indigenous peoples, the forest is not only a place for food, but also a source of traditional medicine. Antlers of the deer, tusks of wild pigs, and the oil, bile, and bones of the reticulated python are only a few of the traditional medicine of the Obo Monuvu. Certain shrubs are also used for medicine, though only the *mananambal* or traditional healer can determine which plant can heal specific illnesses.

The Philippine Cinnamon Tree, locally known as Kalingag, is an herbal medicine believed to lower hypertension, cough, and muscle sprain when steeped in wine and taken every evening. Rattan was also treated as food by the pigs and rodents and used as a folk medicine to relieve diarrhea, while nettle plant is believed to relieve symptoms of Urinary Tract Infection. A certain Balintudog was said to help aid sleep for those suffering from insomnia, while a plant locally known as Aha, a food for bats and birds, was said to help with wound swelling and infections.

Biodiversity in the forests within the territory of the Obo Monuvu also serves the spiritual beliefs of the community and are often included in rituals while the behaviors of certain species are thought of as omen. For plants, Tinikaran, Song-guyan, Mabutiti, and Almaciga are believed to be sacred trees in Imamaling. Due to their physical structure, these are viewed as abodes of the spirits in the forests. A plant locally known as *Malapapaya* is said to symbolize good harvest when it blooms. A plant called *Indang* is used for the *panuvaran* or ritual place and a locally known tree, *Sanggawan*, is allegedly an ingredient in making love potions and is usually associated with bad luck and incidents. Another plant, known as *Lanahon*, is said to be used in warding off bad spirits and entities.

Interestingly, birds have significant cultural value to the Obo Monuvu, often regarded as timekeepers and omen. Birds such as the Philippine Bulbul, Yellow-breasted fruit dove, and hornbills are treated as timekeepers for they make their bird calls at specific times of the day, making it beneficial to farmers and hunters even in the absence of clocks. Large-billed crows are said to symbolize bad luck when seen flying at night. The Philippine Coucal's call is associated with rain while the Brush cuckoo is associated with drought. White-eared brown dove is quite popular among different indigenous community within Mt. Apo range as it serves as an omen especially to travelers. The direction where the sound is heard is a signifier whether the person should pursue his/her travel or not. When a Pinsker's Hawk Eagle is seen paragliding and cooing, it is taken as a message that death will come for a kin member.

It is also a belief among the Obo Monuvu that each species in the forest has its own alpha, bestowed with spiritual abilities as they are guarded by the spirits. According to former hunters, they can distinguish if the animal they hunted is an Alpha because gunshots would not hurt them.

One of those is the Dumaog, the master of the wild pigs. It is characterized as an animal that has white horns and white spots on its face. It also has long fangs that point upwards past its eyes. It is said to be taller, thinner, and has bigger footsteps than the average wild pig. When encountered, a strong wind would blow, and one would feel weak because of its strong and unique smell.

The master of the deer is called the Mananangot, characterized as a small but swift deer. It is said that nobody can hunt the Mananangot; if a hunting dog would chase it, it will just swing its antlers with branches and disappear.

Another Alpha is called Anib-anib, the master of monkeys. It is said that the Anib-anib would walk around alone with a characteristic scary-looking face. Second in line is called the Aliwas, who looks a little less scary than the Anib-anib and has a white spot on its chest. An Imamaw is also a huge monkey that dwells in the forest. There is a fable that monkeys were originally



Philippine Eagle

humans but were punished. Once upon a time, a kid stole something. Because of anger, his mother spanked him with a stick, that the gods turned it into its tail. The kid went into the forest away from human eyes and lived there.

They also claimed that a lion resides in their forests, locally known as the Alimaong. According to the Obo Monuvu, the Alimaong resembles a dog but has exaggerated features that make it look scary. As a large being, the Alimaong feeds on deer.

It was also believed that the Philippine Eagle used to be huge in size, bigger than what it is now. It would even use its talons to pick humans up and bring them to their nest. However, in time, Philippine Eagles became smaller in size, and are no longer capable of lifting humans as they fly.

### **Traditional and Current Governance System**

Indigenous governance, no matter the form, already exists with or without any official recognition. Yet taking indigenous governance into consideration when furthering state governance could help reduce any conflicts that legal pluralism might present (Reilly 2006). Hence, the integration of mainstream and traditional systems of governance, regardless if it were deliberate or not, could benefit an indigenous community.

#### **Manobo**

The governance structure at the sitio level is patterned after the barangay council. As knowledge of the national and local laws are passed down to the sitio from the barangay, the sitios have what the people call as “*sub kapitan*” for a leader and they also have a sitio council of local leaders and elders. However, probably more apparent on the sitio site is the level of integration of the mainstream governance with the traditional system or *povian woy gontangan* where a mediation of conflicts occurs through the guidance of a leader or a datu or boi.

Yet, not all sitios in Manobo have a resident datu or boi. Manuel Serrano Bayoc, Sr. is the recognized leader in Sitio Kisimbit. He was born in Uwas, Magpet in 1975 and transferred to Brgy. Manobo where his wife is a resident of Sitio Kisimbit. He is the sub captain of the sitio, is on his third term as leader, and will still run during the next elections. According to sitio leader Manuel Serrano Bayoc, Sr., there is no datu or boi yet in their local community. Sitio leader Manuel Serrano Bayoc, Sr. is the leader, since he can speak with either the military or NPA whenever an armed conflict ensues in the area.

The sitio leader, together with his secretary and councilors are tasked to handle conflicts at the sitio level. They are the ones who conduct *husay* or mediation. The conflicts they handle include land issues and conflicts between married couples. When it comes to land conflicts, they often settle those that concern boundaries. The process involves separately speaking with each of the concerned parties before having a dialogue with both. According to Manuel Bayoc, Sr., the process is part of their traditional system and customary laws, which they incorporated into their barangay governance down to the sitio level. After the traditional means of assessing the conflict, they will enforce a penalty of P1,000.00 for the individual who went over the boundary.

For married couples that decide to dissolve their marriage, the party at fault will receive a P30,000.00 penalty and will no longer have any property share.

Sub Captain Julita Lumatag Amban was born in Ilyan, Magpet but was raised in Sitio Pontaron where her father is from. Her father was not officially recognized as a datu but had functions like one. People approached her father for solutions to their problems. Eventually, younger generations followed the advice and practices of elders like the father of Sitio leader Julita Amban.

The datu and boi can facilitate a *husay* or *aregla*, which serves as a conflict mediation between affronted parties. And when the situation calls for it, the boi or datu will pay the penalty when the penalized cannot afford it. The act of paying the penalty symbolizes that *tampod to' saa* is done or the *kasamok* or conflict has been cut. The leaders will speak with the offending party to keep him from repeating his offense.

People regard today's datu as reliable when it comes to finding solutions to problems and mediating conflicts. Sitio leader Julita Amban's father was not a datu. However, people relied on him when it comes to addressing their problems. Traditionally, people would choose their leader based on the person's capacity to lead and create plans that will benefit the community. That is the case for Sitio leader Amban who was able to establish a Baptist church in their sitio without the need for people to shell out money. As a leader, she also must be a decisionmaker for matters concerning the use of, access to, and ownership of land. According to Amban, the people will decide on who they will recognize as a datu or boi in the area.

However, not all sitios have cases of people choosing their leaders. Others have leaders who were endorsed by then Brgy. Chairman Rolando Pelonio, Sr. Sub Captain Binbenido Buwulan ran for Elib sitio leader back in 1996. He was elected by the people after he was endorsed by the father of current Magpet Brgy. Captain Roldan Pelonio.

The same is true for Sub Captain Arsenio Ugot Sicao who was born in Indangan, Kidapawan. He has relatives in Davao and Barangay Manobisa. Sub Captain Sicao grew up in Tamayong and transferred to Manobo after meeting his wife Adoring Imba. Two years after the establishment of Manobo as a barangay, Rolando Pelonio, Sr. assigned Mahitang as the place of residency of Arsenio Sicao. Sitio leader Arsenio Sicao also received the task of assigning up to two hectares of land for every resident or household.

From the sitio level to the barangay level, community leaders, the datu, and boi are expected to sit down and mediate conflicts between the aggrieved and accused parties. Leaders negotiate with the parties prior to conducting a *pamaas* or ritual to signify a resolution. However, if the issue remains unresolved even with the *pamaas*, a verdict is made which they call *tahi*.

#### ***Don Panaca***

The current governance system of Don Panaca also follows an integration of the traditional and the mainstream. Don Panaca has a council of leaders at the barangay level and has a clan-based tribal council. Representatives from the tribal council comprise the Monuvu to Don Panaca Nok'kod sok'kad to Kodudso woy Koling'gow (MDNKK) – the local Indigenous Peoples

Organization of the barangay. At the time of interview, the following clans make up the tribal council:

1. Dulangan	7. Bacag
2. Sauyan	8. Andab
3. Buntal	9. Tambonan
4. Bitil	10. Tambonan*
5. Atuwing	11. Ampoy
6. Bugcal	12. Sumandang

\*There are two representatives for the *duway* families (marriage with two wives) of the Tambonan clan

These clans were residents of Don Panaca even back when it was still a sitio of Sallab. As mentioned earlier, Don Panaca was part of a wide activity area of the Alcantara logging concessionaire. In 1974, the foundation of Don Panaca's primary school building came from the bark of miscellaneous trees locally referred to as "*tinuklap na kahoy*." Barangay officials consented to the logging activities of both the company and Obo Monuvu from Tambobong, an adjacent barangay. The Obo Monuvu from Tambobong arrived in sitio Don Panaca to farm and gather wood. However, the Guardiya Monte or private armed group of Alcantara confiscated their tools and prevented them from doing their activity. Hence, the Obo Monuvu of both Don Panaca and Barangay Tambobong were not allowed to harvest materials. This led to a conflict between the IP community and the company as well as a misunderstanding of boundaries between Tambobong and Don Panaca.

Practicing their customary law, the leaders of Don Panaca sat down for a dialogue with the company, DENR, and representatives of Tambobong. Back then, according to a datu, the DENR decided on its own when identifying areas deemed suitable for logging activities. An *areglo* or settlement was done to resolve the conflict. Subsequently, Barangay Sallab councilor Esteban Tambonan requested the barangay captain then to issue a resolution for the separation of Don Panaca and its establishment as a barangay. While tribal leaders and officials continued their work on the school building using *tinuklap na kahoy*, Don Panaca also became a barangay of its own.

In 1975, Felipe Sauyan became the first Barangay Captain of Don Panaca. On the same year, the logging company together with the DENR personnel left the area. The logging stopped and people gathered to form the Don Panaca community.

Even years after the establishment of Don Panaca as a barangay, the leaders continued to exercise their customary laws when faced with cases of land acquisition and illicit access. In 2017, a resident of Barangay Sallab went to Sitio Mangawahan and Napaliku of Don Panaca to cut trees and farm. Without consultation with the tribal council of Panaca, he prepared almost two hectares of land for agricultural purposes.

Since he has no consent for his actions, upon hearing what he did, the barangay and tribal officials called his attention. The leaders of Don Panaca asked him to stop his activities. They also warned him that he already crossed the boundaries of Don Panaca. When the Sallab resident did not heed the warnings, barangay officials and forest guards, whom PEF assisted into becoming Wildlife Enforcement Officers (WEO), called his attention. With proof gathered

by the forest guards, the Sallab resident had no choice but to sign an agreement that he will no longer clear the area and return to it.

### ***Imamaling***

At the time of interview, Barangay Imamaling has eleven datu and three boi. The datu and boi are representatives of the following clans:

Datu	Bo-i
1. Calimpitan	1. Ical
2. Ayag	2. Lordabia
3. Aggad	3. Imban
4. Biya	
5. Supida	
6. Ban'nan	
7. Mariano	
8. Saud	
9. Agwan	
10. Bogay	
11. Imban	
12. Empoc	

Obo Monuvu residents of Imamaling believe in the capacity of leaders to mediate conflicts particularly those that arise between clan members. The clan representatives will make up a negotiation panel for parties involved. With the presence of another leader, a *panagsabot* or dialogue will take place. Meetings will continue until all parties arrive at a resolution. The parties will decide on an *ekot* or *panagpuli*. It could be money or a property of good value and can be used to restore the broken relationship between parties.

In the 1960's somewhere near Mt. Dalikkan in Imamaling, Sadani Ayag went into the forest to hunt a deer. He brought with him his hunting dog, which in turn found a deer in the area. However, the dog soon got lost just as soon as Sadani Ayag caught the deer. Simultaneously, another group of hunters from the other side of the mountain were going after the deer even before Sadani Ayag. This group of hunters did not find the deer but eventually got the dog.

In this case, Sadani Ayag and the other hunters engaged in a *bakka* system wherein the party who caught the deer could ask for money or any material of value in exchange of the game. But since Sadani Ayag wanted his hunting dog back, he provided the other hunters some money and radio to get it back.

Back in the 70's, a certain Datu Said arrived in Imamaling and began clearing and tilling a parcel of land without consulting and asking for consent from the leaders. Since he illicitly opened an area for farming, the leaders of Imamaling asked him to leave the area.

Also in the 1970's up to the 80's, two logging companies operated in Imamaling. According to Councilor Marlon Ayag, son of Sadani Ayag, his father used to create a *batik*. The *batik* is a trap, which when stepped on, a huge log will come swinging and hit the person or animal caught in it. Back then, Sadani Ayag created a number of *batik* in almaciga areas. The almaciga is an

important tree species that serves as a source of light for the Obo Monuvu and Sadani Ayag did not want any almaciga trees cut by loggers.

Due to the presence of *batik*, the loggers stopped cutting trees in the area. The leaders knew that logging became a part of their livelihood. However, they also understood that the community had to protect the remaining forest patches in their ancestral domain.

Today, Imamaling has forest guards who will conduct forest patrols to monitor activities within the area. Twenty (20) Bantay Lumot (forest guards) took an oath in front of DENR officers to guard and control forest activities. They serve as the forest ranger nowadays who protect the wildlife and habitat in accordance with their customary laws.

As we can see in Barangays Manobo, Don Panaca, and Imamaling, integrations of the traditional with the mainstream have been implemented at various levels. In Barangay Manobo, they follow a mainstream vertical governance structure that acknowledges units at the sitio and barangay level. Integrated with the mainstream is a horizontal traditional governance structure that recognizes the roles of the datu, boi, and council of elders particularly in addressing community conflicts that involve the individuals and their resources.

For Don Panaca, while they currently implement a mainstream governance system, their tribal council is still based on their traditions that value clan-based leadership. Through the presence of their tribal council, they can address concerns regarding boundaries, land ownership, use, and access.



Imamaling also follows the mainstream governance structure with their sitio and barangay leaders. However, their leaders are known representatives of the Obo Monuvu clans in the barangay. Their elected leaders are individuals in whom the people see qualities of a good datu and boi, people who can mediate conflicts and speak for their community when the moment requires.

The Obo Monuvu during their ICCA declaration

## Livelihood

To a certain level, indigenous peoples and other stakeholders saw the landscapes of ancestral domains in terms of commodities, treating elements of an ecosystem as extractable and almost fit to be a currency (Cronon 1983). Trade by the Obo Monuvu of Magpet is alive through buy and sell transactions for cash crops. Labor is also a contributing factor to the economy, which in the general sense is perceived to have demands that oppose the needs of any environment to survive (Gibson-Graham and Miller 2015).

In **Magpet**, most products are *tohit'ti*, banana, abaca, *bukag*, and vegetables. Working the land can often call for a *lusong* or the Filipino concept of *bayanihan* where members of the community help each other and work towards a common goal. However, a call for *lusong* could also mean that the owner of the land or the crops to be harvested will provide *lugar suhol* – payment for hiring other community members for agricultural labor.

In Kisimbit, people who have tilled the lands in groups of ten have received P100 per day while working on Sundays and Mondays. The practice is originally Visayan and was only adapted by the Obo Monuvu community.

Traditionally, the elders and ancestors who lived in Sitio Pontaron in Manobo would manually mill their corns for consumption. They would not sell their corns even though their harvests were more than enough for their households. Today, the people of Pontaron transport their corn for milling in Poblacion, Magpet. The person who transported the produce will receive 4 *gantang* or roughly a half sack of corn. The milled corn is still for consumption.

Across Magpet, Obo Monuvu communities engage in laborious work, manually stripping abaca fibers. The owner of abaca gets 40% of profit for selling the fibers while the laborer gets 60%. The per kilogram price of abaca is at 50 pesos. They sell the abaca fibers in Marbol and oftentimes the laborer also acts as the seller of the product. Should they have more products than what one seller can carry, they also hire other transporters of the abaca at 6 pesos per kilogram. If the owner of the abaca decides to provide food for the laborers, the division of profit changes to 50-50.



An Obo Monuvu farmer prepares abaca strips in his farm

Sometimes the Obo Monuvu sellers reach as far as Barangay Ilomavis in Kidapawan City to sell their abaca. Often, the buyers of such abaca fibers engage in a buy and sell system where they sell the raw

materials at a higher price. Aside from abaca, some Obo Monuvu also sell coffee at 100 pesos per kilogram. And just like the abaca, they sell the coffee in the barangay and in the población.



An Obo Monuvu farmer teaches a PEF researcher the proper method of gathering abaca fibers.

Aside from abaca, the people also sell tohit'ti by the dozens priced at around 340 pesos. However, the price depends on the volume of produce. In 2017, they were able to price a dozen tohit'ti at 600 pesos. They sell the tohit'ti in the barangay población. They also sell the soft brooms at 70 pesos apiece. However, if they produce a double-stitched broom packaged as a product of Baguio City, they were able to sell it at 80 pesos.



Soft broom products of the Obo Monuvu in Magpet; families sell these products in the Poblacion or nearby city of Kidapawan

Several areas in many upland sitios have become farmlands for some Obo Monuvu families including those who have evacuated and have not yet returned to their original place of residence. Many of these families are planting abaca, *lagutmon*, and *balanghay*. Root crops are mostly for subsistence while they sell the abaca fibers in the población. There are also periods when they plant corn, which is either for their consumption or for selling. If a household cannot plant corn, the alternative is to sell the abaca fibers so they can buy rice. They sell the fibers at 55 pesos per kilogram, with a 60-40 division between the owner and laborer. The laborer can work on producing abaca fibers twice in a month.

### The Art of Weaving

A meeting with culture bearer Bo-i Elma Supida Dañiola, weaver Od Aavoo Fidela Egaan, and IPMR Datu Basilio Padaya Sr. was set up to document the dying art of inavoo weaving. Bo-i required the conduct of a panubadtubad or prayer prior to the documentation of the inavoo weaving process. They consider the inavoo, or the traditional Obo Monuvu cloth as sacred since without it they will remain naked. By conducting the padugo or sacrificing a native chicken, Datu Basilio Padaya asked for the guidance of the tohovikaa or spirit of wisdom so that there would be a smooth sharing of traditional knowledge.

#### Parts of an Ovollan – a backstrap handloom weaving device

- I. ***Busak* – to set up an ovollan**
  - a. *Sonduwan* – will depend on the length of the material or skirt
  - b. *Loggee* (three sticks) – wood from the trunk of the bohibbi and wood from palmera
  - c. *Bollo-an* – bamboo stick
  - d. *Bangbang* – could be made of wood or rattan
  - e. *Eovo* – made of bahibbi or bu-ud
  - f. *Oowit* – backstrap wrapped in a sack or plastic so it will not hurt the weaver while wearing it
  - g. *Borello* – to tighten; made from bohibbi or bahe
  - h. *Lungan, pallu* – needlelike wood
  - i. *Upas, turokkan to busak* – for the saddang, to setup the other parts of the ovollan
- II. ***Lihisan* – to iron the inavoo**
  - a. *Appag* – ironing board
  - b. *Lihis* – used for shining the cloth
  - c. *Baatik* – hardwood stick from which the lihis hangs
  - d. *Bouhanan* – hardwood stick that connects the lihis and batik

#### Weaving Process

- Cut abaca or *la-ing*
- Slice (*ponoppikon*) the abaca into 1-inch strips
- *Tassi* - peel the abaca
- *Oli-aa* – pull the abaca fibers
- *Bogkossion* – tie the end of the fibers
- *Binoyyuwon* – pound the fibers to soften them
- *Dukottan* – take away split fibers or any crumpled portions of the pounded fibers

- *Dunghay* – leave the pounded fibers overnight to rest; if they are not yet soft the following morning, repeat the *binoyyuwon* step
- For a *kinatkat* pattern:
  - *Batok* – color per bundle by cooking the abaca fibers in boiling water, add around 3 tablespoons of salt; stir for around 1 minute then add the dye. Traditional colors are *sikareg* (red) and *kinarom* (black). The colors come from the bark, sap, or roots of trees. Combining *sikareg* and *kinarom* produces a brown or orange hue.
  - The paint or dye is from Kidapawan City or Davao. Soak the abaca fibers in the water with dye for around 5 minutes, while continuing to stir.
  - Hang to dry. However, keep the fibers away from direct heat for it will harden the fibers
  - *Suddung* – connect the threads once dry
  - *Bollu-u* – create a ball thread
  - *Saddang* – place the threads in the busak
  - *Tuging*
  - *Aavoo* – weave
  - Remove woven material then sew edges
- *Binodbod no Inayan* pattern (mother and children – a wide and narrow pattern)
  - *Saddang*
  - *Bodbod* – start to tie portions of the fibers using abaca and needle; number the rows of the binodbod
  - Color and hang to dry (*dunghay*) – repeat depending on the number of colors to be used
  - *Abohan* – wipe with ash, wash with running water then hang to dry
  - Let sit in water for 2 nights to wash the ash; if there is no need to rush
  - *Suddung*
  - *Bollu-u*

#### **Types of Aavoo (woven cloth)**

1. *Oruwa Tolliyani* – can be thin cloth or a thick one with two layers
2. *Lumbus Binodbod* – pure design, without any thin lines
3. *Kinatkat* – lines with varying thickness forming a striped pattern

When asked about the meanings of patterns, Bo-i Elma referred us to USM Kabacan where information gathered by a PhD student is compiled.

When the aavoo is used as a garment, the inavoo or skirt of a woman has horizontal stripes while the clothes of a man has a vertical pattern.

The *tid aavoo* or *od aavoo* (weaver) has an *abiyan* or a spirit that provides the skill and guidance required to weave. The *abyan* is called *Tohomaling*. With the guidance of Tohomaling, the process of weaving becomes sacred. Hence, the Obo Monuvu believe that weaving must be done in a quiet place with little disturbance.



Bollu-u demonstrated by male culture bearers



Apo Fidela Egaan, one of the last two *Od Aavoo* in Manobo, sits by her ovellan after the *panubadtubad* and *padugo*.



Various colored *la-ing* or abaca, ready for weaving



Various parts of the ovellan necessary for weaving an inavoo.



An inavoo with a kinatkat pattern.



An inavoo with a binodvod no Inayan pattern, considered to be more expensive than a kinatkat as it shows the owner or wearer has a higher social status.

## **Land Access, Use, and Ownership**

When a person decides to relocate to an Obo Monuvu community in Magpet, he or she will be under observation of the leader for a certain period with some areas reaching around six (6) months. The sitio leaders and elders will also consult each other and interview the migrant – regardless if he or she is an IP or non-IP. The sitio leaders will then decide whether the migrant can stay or not. The standard size of the land that an IP migrant can own, use, and access is two hectares. The same goes for a non-IP migrant, except that they cannot own the land.<sup>1</sup>

There are no private titles within the ancestral domains in Magpet. In Manobo, to officially recognize the land tenure of a migrant, barangay officials will issue a certification to be signed by the NCIP. The implementation began after the formulation of their ADSDPP. The certification process was put in place so people cannot easily sell or grab lands. Currently no land is being rented in some of the sitios. Should land rental happen, the parties involved will have to go through the Ancestral Domain Management Association (ADMA) of the barangay. The council of leaders and elders that make up the ADMA oversees any changes in land tenure in the domain.

The leaders will decide who can use and own land as well as who can access the resources in the area. When someone new to the place arrives, s/he can suggest a place, but the leader will decide if the land is available. In some areas, the elders will decide on how the land shall be distributed and used by the residents. Here, they release barangay-issued certification to landholders. It would certify the holder as owner of a parcel of land, following the indigenous concept of ownership which is also recognized by the mainstream governance.

In Manobo, only an IP can receive a certificate of ownership in the barangay. When the landholder decides to no longer till the land, he or she can return the certificate of ownership to the Ancestral Domain Management Association so another person can work on the land. According to sitio leader Buwulan, the certification follows a patriarchal process. The husband will have his name on the land ownership certification. Only in cases when the husband is a non-IP will the name of the wife appear on the certificate.

## **Natural Resource Governance**

These resources are undeniably valuable to the Obo Monuvu. Since time immemorial, the indigenous community has a system in managing these resources, assuring that its usage will be for the benefit of the survival of their community and culture. Just like other indigenous communities, they have a leader referred to as the “datu” appointed by the community and elders because of their leadership skills. The Datu is then responsible with the important decisions in the community and serves as the “protector” of the people, for instance negotiating in times of the “husay” for the “sala” committed by a community member. Leaders in the community may be either male or female, as the “gift” of leadership is what matters to the community.

However, as different influences came in the community, their resource governance and leadership also evolved and, in some cases, integrated with the mainstream politics to harmonize both indigenous and

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<sup>1</sup> During the time of interview, several sitios in the partner Obo Monuvu areas in Magpet had no non-Manobo individual residing in their community.

government policies in managing the resources in the ancestral domain and to guide the people living in it.

In the past, territories are determined by clan or by sitio headed by a Datu, using bodies of water as traditional boundaries. Within this territory, it is the responsibility of the Datu to keep peace and order in the community. For instance, if a hunter hunt in a different territory, the hunters, with their Datu, shall have a negotiation on the accountability for hunting in a different territory.

In terms of conflict, a “husay” or settlement is conducted at sitio level. If resolution is still not achieved, the husay shall be brought to the Barangay Tribal Council where the sanctions and penalties shall be decided by the parties involved mediated by the Council of Elders and Leaders. In the present time, if the conflict is still not resolved by the Tribal Council, the conflict shall be brought to the Barangay Council for resolution and further actions.

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