

Original Article

Traditional Conflict Resolution in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract. This study explored the indigenous conflict resolution practices of Kibungan, Benguet, amid globalization's influence. Specifically, it examined how barangay officials and indigenous representatives described traditional mechanisms, how globalization affected these practices, and what strategies were employed to preserve and adapt them. Using a qualitative multi-site case study design, the research used semi-structured interviews with six key cultural experts, such as elders, local leaders, and members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa with specialized knowledge of indigenous mediation processes. Purposive sampling ensured that respondents were directly involved in, or recognized for, their expertise in cultural practices. Data collection was conducted in selected barangays of Kibungan, namely Sagpat, Poblacion, and Madaymen, with the researcher securing permissions from local government units and indigenous councils. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework was employed to identify recurring themes, including the role of rituals (sabosab, manmanok, bunong, ngilin, and pugog) as integral components of reconciliation and justice. Findings revealed that conflict resolution in Kibungan was not merely a social process but also a spiritual and symbolic one, emphasizing closure, healing, and community cohesion. Despite external pressures brought by globalization, these practices demonstrated resilience and adaptability, highlighting their continued relevance in contemporary governance and community life. This study contributes to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and offers insights into alternative justice models that prioritize reconciliation, cultural sensitivity, and collective responsibility. It also provides practical implications for policy-making, education, and community development, ensuring that indigenous voices remain central in navigating globalization.

Keywords: Globalization; Indigenous conflict resolution; Rituals.

Indigenous communities globally have continually maintained unique cultural systems that govern through formal and informal administration, social regulation, and the resolution of conflicts (Acevedo-Ortiz, 2024). In many Indigenous societies, conflict-resolution methods are not viewed as isolated dispute mechanisms, but as all-inclusive processes that connect social, spiritual, and environmental dimensions (Allam, 2021). Rather than relying on punitive measures, these systems reflect collective values that accentuate restoration, reconciliation, and community welfare (Alpha & Tumelo, 2024). These traditional mechanisms often operate in parallel with formal legal systems, offering a complementary framework for justice and social harmony (Alvarez, 2023).

Indigenous communities globally have long maintained unique cultural systems that govern through formal and informal administration, social regulation, and conflict resolution (Acevedo-Ortiz, 2024). In many Indigenous

societies, conflict-resolution methods are not viewed as isolated dispute mechanisms, but as inclusive processes that connect social, spiritual, and environmental dimensions (Allam, 2021). Rather than relying on punitive measures, these systems reflect collective values that accentuate restoration, reconciliation, and community welfare (Alpha & Tumelo, 2024). These traditional mechanisms often operate alongside formal legal systems, offering a complementary framework for justice and social harmony (Altarez, 2023).

Customary justice systems operate alongside formal legal institutions, creating forms of legal pluralism in which customary norms, state law, and Indigenous rights frameworks interact (Prill-Brett, 1994, 2007). In the Cordillera, Indigenous dispute-resolution practices continue to demonstrate the role of culturally embedded dialogue and elder-mediated processes in addressing community disputes (Balatong et al., 2022; Ballagan & Nuval, 2026).

Globally, Indigenous groups span more than 90 countries and represent approximately 476 million individuals, or around 6% of the world population (Redvers, Aubrey, Celidwen, & Hill, 2023). These communities serve as major agents in preserving biodiversity, cultural history, and non-governmental forms of governance (Diab, 2022). The customary legal landscapes in indigenous territories stand in stark contrast to the adversarial and punitive systems prevailing in Western countries, leaning instead toward mediation, restorative justice, and consensus-building (Balangen & Magulod, 2023). For example, disputes among Māori communities in New Zealand are often resolved through whānau (extended family) and iwi (tribal) gatherings, which place peace and reconciliation at the heart of the process (Supangco & Parao, 2022). Likewise, Native American tribes in the United States preserve peacemaking circles that focus on restoring victim-offender relationships, community accountability, and storytelling (Fiolet, 2020).

The United Nations has explicitly recognized the significance of Indigenous legal and governance systems in advancing human rights and social justice (Fisher, 2020). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous communities' rights to maintain and strengthen their institutions and traditions, including conflict resolution mechanisms (Fjellheim, 2023). Integrating these practices into wider justice systems can contribute to more effective, culturally sensitive, and sustainable outcomes worldwide (Fredericks, 2021). For example, indigenous communities in Latin America continue to use customary courts to resolve conflicts, reflecting collective values and communal responsibility (Andalan & Balangcod, 2024).

In many African nations, traditional leaders and councils play central roles in conflict resolution, often addressing land disputes, familial conflicts, and resource-sharing challenges (Gomez, 2022). In Ghana, for instance, chieftaincy institutions use customary law, mediatory councils, and restorative measures to maintain peace, showing that Indigenous frameworks can work effectively alongside statutory law (Hutchison, 2021). Furthermore, Jolly and Thompson-Fawcett (2021) emphasize the adaptability of Indigenous conflict resolution practices in urban and transnational contexts; for instance, Indigenous populations in Canadian cities rely on Elders' councils and community-based restorative programs to resolve conflicts within urban environments, proving these mechanisms are not strictly contained to rural or isolated communities (Latorre, 2022).

Moreover, globalization has intensified the interaction between local practices and national or international legal frameworks (Launio, 2020). Cross-cultural exchanges, migration, and international human rights advocacy shape the evolution of Indigenous conflict resolution into hybrid models that combine traditional and formal legal principles (Leiner, 2025). Lundy (2021) highlights that while globalization poses distinct challenges, it also creates opportunities for Indigenous communities to raise their voices, negotiate autonomy, and educate wider audiences about culturally rooted approaches to justice. This underscores the importance of documenting and analyzing these practices to inform global policy, comparative law, and peacebuilding efforts (McGuire-Adams, 2020). International development frameworks recognize Indigenous governance and justice systems as critical components of sustainable development, social inclusion, and community resilience (Gilbert & Lennox, 2019). By situating these mechanisms within a global framework, contemporary literature emphasizes the universality of principles such as restorative justice, consensus-building, and community-oriented reconciliation (Dutta, 2020).

In the domestic sphere, the Philippines is home to more than 14 million Indigenous peoples, collectively known as Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs), representing over 110 ethno-linguistic groups nationwide (Nursanty, 2024). These communities possess distinct social, political, and legal systems that have historically governed their internal affairs (Paalo, 2021). Indigenous conflict resolution remains deeply rooted in kinship, reciprocity, and spiritual accountability, often resulting in rituals, community assemblies, and

negotiated settlements (Yellowhorse, 2024). In contrast to formal court processes, these practices focus on restoring broken relationships, reconciliation, and shared community responsibility (Yousaf, 2020). Community elders, tribal councils, or bodong (peace pact) leaders facilitate customary conflict resolution through dialogue, mediation, and restorative justice to maintain communal harmony (Rembulan, 2021). As a result, they contribute significantly to preventing conflict escalation, promoting social cohesion, and protecting community well-being (Zurba, 2021). Recent research in the Cordillera demonstrates that these practices remain active mechanisms of mediation and social cohesion; Basilio et al. (2024), for instance, documented the Tingiting practice among the Balangao community in Eastern Mountain Province as an elder-led form of conflict resolution.

Historically, Indigenous communities in the Philippine Cordillera have maintained legal pluralism by drawing upon customary laws alongside national legal orders (Prill-Brett, 1994). In the domestic sphere, the Philippines is home to a diverse array of ethno-linguistic groups whose customary conflict resolution practices remain active mechanisms of mediation and social cohesion. Traditional elder-based systems provide flexible, context-sensitive approaches that complement formal legal processes, preserving cultural identity and strengthening cohesion (Briggs, 2023). Elders continuously modify or discard practices that no longer benefit the community, ensuring that custom remains dynamic and adaptive (Dalog, 2021).

Republic Act No. 8371, or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, institutionalized these systems by affirming rights to self-governance, ancestral domain management, and customary dispute resolution mechanisms essential to preserving cultural integrity (Phillips, 2022; Redvers, 2020). Complementary national policies further facilitate coordination between local government units (LGUs) and IP communities (Shay, 2022). In the Cordillera Administrative Region, LGUs regularly collaborate with Indigenous councils to settle land, family, and resource-sharing disputes, demonstrating operational synergy between statutory and customary law (Smidt, 2019). The Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160) supports this coexistence by promoting participatory governance alongside municipal and provincial frameworks (Spiegel, 2020).

Recognizing the value of these governance systems, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued DepEd Order No. 66, s. 2016 to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and conflict management into school curricula, fostering social responsibility and ethical awareness among youth (Robinson, 2021; Setiawan, 2025). However, significant challenges persist. Tanabe et al. (2026) highlighted that Indigenous peace mechanisms in the Cordillera operate within continuing tensions between indigenous cosmologies and formal state legal and governance frameworks. Furthermore, modernization, migration, formal legal pressures, commercial land interests, and globalization continue to undercut traditional methods, compelling IP communities to adopt adaptive strategies (Rahman, 2025; Stepanova, 2020). Preserving Indigenous conflict resolution remains both a cultural necessity and a socio-legal imperative for maintaining peace and identity (Waitoki, 2022).

Despite this broad wealth of literature, Philippine research reveals a critical knowledge gap in systematically documenting and analyzing localized conflict resolution practices, particularly in remote municipalities such as Kibungan, Benguet. While IPRA and related national policies formally recognize these practices, their operational mechanisms, contextual effectiveness, and specific socio-cultural impacts remain underexplored, underscoring the need for focused empirical studies.

Kibungan, a mountainous municipality in Benguet, is mainly populated by the Ibaloi and Kankanaey Indigenous groups. The community maintains core elements of its culture, practicing localized dispute resolution through elders, tribal councils, and customary agreements. These distinct, everyday community practices—rooted in kinship, communal norms, and ancestral beliefs—play a significant role in settling issues related to land boundaries, family matters, and resource use. Local governance in Kibungan often collaborates with Indigenous councils to integrate customary practices with municipal administrative procedures. Reports from local development offices indicate that this partnership enhances dispute resolution efficiency, reinforces community trust, and preserves cultural heritage.

While global and national literature provides extensive insights into Indigenous conflict resolution generally, localized empirical studies focused on Kibungan remain scarce. Existing literature often generalizes Cordilleran practices without documenting the specific methods, cultural rationales, and socio-political dynamics unique to each distinct municipality. A clear gap remains in understanding how globalization, modernization, and external legal systems influence these traditional mechanisms, and how this community negotiates continuity and

adaptation. This study addresses this gap by comprehensively exploring Kibungan's Indigenous conflict resolution practices and documenting both their procedural and cultural dimensions. In doing so, it contributes to preserving intangible cultural heritage, informing culturally sensitive governance policies, and offering alternative conflict-resolution frameworks that prioritize reconciliation, community cohesion, and cultural sustainability.

This study on the Indigenous conflict resolution practices in Kibungan, Benguet, amid the pressures of globalization, draws on four key theoretical lenses. First, Social Exchange Theory, developed by Homans and expanded by Blau (1964), views interpersonal relationships as cost-benefit exchanges of tangible or intangible rewards, such as respect, status, and restitution. In the context of Kibungan, this mirrors elder-led negotiations in which decisions carefully balance communal duties, social equilibrium, and individual needs to preserve long-term social cohesion.

Building on this structural balance, Restorative Justice Theory focuses on repairing harm through stakeholder accountability, making amends, and community reintegration rather than relying on punitive isolation (Zehr, 2002). This framework fits the structural dynamics of Kibungan's *tongtongan* dialogues, where community elders facilitate the open expression of grievances and collective reconciliation to restore harmony and prevent future cyclical conflicts.

Complementing these mechanisms, A cultural-relativist perspective provides a useful interpretive lens for understanding customary practices within their own historical and cultural contexts. Boas (1940) emphasized the importance of examining cultural practices within the contexts in which they developed rather than evaluating them exclusively through external cultural standards.

Finally, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) highlight the *tongtongan* as an elder-mediated, consensus-building process deeply rooted in grassroots participation, shared history, and traditional rituals. This perspective underscores the vital role of culturally grounded knowledge and community involvement in Indigenous dispute resolution (Balatong et al., 2022; Ballagan & Nuval, 2026). Furthermore, Colicol (2024) emphasizes that IKS must be approached in ways that respect Indigenous worldviews, heritage, and identities while remaining responsive to changing social contexts.

The research addresses three key objectives: (1) identifying the indigenous conflict resolution practices of the community; (2) examining the practices that foster social cohesion and adapt to external pressures like globalization and modernization, and (3) examining and promoting the strategies employed by the *barangay* and indigenous representatives to strengthen, preserve, or adapt traditional conflict resolution in the face of globalization

The study provided the Department of Education (DepEd) with empirical evidence on integrating indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) into educational policies and programs, highlighting how conflict resolution practices among indigenous communities could inform culturally responsive teaching and promote values such as respect, cooperation, and social responsibility among learners. By understanding these traditional mechanisms, DepEd designed curricula that fostered inclusivity and intercultural understanding and supported indigenous learners in maintaining cultural identity while navigating mainstream education. School heads and administrators also benefited from the study's insights by applying indigenous conflict resolution practices in school management and student affairs, using restorative and culturally sensitive approaches that emphasized reconciliation rather than punishment. The findings further guided school leaders in creating policies that integrated indigenous practices, strengthened collaboration with communities, and built environments that respected diversity and social cohesion.

For teachers, the study served as a resource to implement culturally responsive pedagogy, incorporating indigenous values into classroom management and instruction. By learning from Kibungan dispute-resolution practices, teachers facilitated dialogue, mediation, and collaborative problem-solving while fostering empathy, accountability, and respect for cultural norms, ultimately becoming advocates for preserving indigenous knowledge. Learners, in turn, gained awareness of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and their relevance to modern society, developed skills in negotiation, empathy, and restorative practices, and cultivated identity, responsibility, and respect for diverse perspectives.

The indigenous community of Kibungan gained recognition and validation of its traditional practices, strengthening its capacity to preserve, adapt, and sustain cultural heritage while informing local governance and development programs. This fostered pride, awareness, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, ensuring the continued relevance of indigenous systems. This study explores indigenous conflict resolution among the Kankanaey of Kibungan, Benguet, focusing on the mechanisms elders and traditional leaders use to resolve family, land, and resource disputes. It examines how these practices foster social cohesion and adapt to external pressures like globalization and modernization.

However, the research is limited to the specific geographic context of Kibungan and relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to participant bias. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity may restrict access to some information, and the study prioritizes indigenous knowledge systems over formal judicial or legal perspectives.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative multiple-case design to explore indigenous conflict resolution in Kibungan, Benguet. As Yin (2018) and Stake (2006) note, case studies suit examining complex practices in real contexts. Three barangays—Poblacion, Sagpat, and Madaymen—were selected as distinct cases, each with two participants, for a total of six (6). While the sample was limited to institutional gatekeepers (elders, indigenous representatives, barangay officials, and Lupon members) rather than ordinary litigants, their accounts provided specialized insights into community dispute resolution. The study did not aim to measure prevalence or generalize findings but to capture how knowledgeable actors described, maintained, and adapted practices.

Sample and Population of the Study

The study involved six participants from Kibungan, Benguet, with two drawn purposively from each of the three barangays—Poblacion, Sagpat, and Madaymen. Participants included elders, indigenous representatives, barangay officials, and Lupon Tagapamayapa members with specialized knowledge of local conflict resolution. The small number per barangay reflected the qualitative aim of obtaining information-rich accounts rather than statistical representation. Each barangay was retained as a separate case to highlight differences in geographic, socioeconomic, and community contexts, with findings interpreted through cross-case comparison.

The sample was limited to institutional knowledge holders rather than ordinary litigants, a methodological delimitation the study acknowledges. The study selected these participants because the research questions required detailed insights into the operation, interpretation, and adaptation of indigenous mechanisms. Accordingly, the study does not claim to represent community members' personal experiences or satisfaction but instead provides an institutional and cultural account of how practices were understood and transmitted. Kibungan was chosen as the study site due to its established recognition of indigenous governance, including the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) and the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) system. The study used purposive sampling to select participants whose roles and experiences made them appropriate sources of information on customary conflict resolution.

Inclusion criteria differed between barangay officials and indigenous representatives. For barangay officials, participants had to: (a) be currently serving or have previously served as officials in Kibungan, Benguet; (b) have experience in handling conflict resolution cases within the barangay; and (c) be willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent. For indigenous representatives, participants had to: (a) be identified by the community as a traditional leader, elder, or cultural expert in Kibungan, Benguet; (b) possess direct knowledge and experience in handling or assisting in conflict resolution within the barangay; and (c) be willing to participate in the study and provide informed consent. Exclusion criteria applied to barangay officials who were not residing in Kibungan, Benguet, who were not actively involved in barangay affairs, or who were unable or unwilling to provide informed consent. For indigenous representatives, exclusion applied to those not recognized by the community as traditional leaders, elders, or cultural experts, and those unable or unwilling to provide informed consent.

Data Gathering Tools

The primary research instrument was a researcher-made, semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit rich,

detailed, and meaningful narratives from indigenous representatives and barangay officials in Kibungan, Benguet. Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility of open-ended questions with a predetermined set of guide questions, allowing the researcher to explore participants' perspectives while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. This format is particularly suited for studies involving indigenous communities, as it respects cultural protocols, acknowledges oral traditions, and allows respondents to narrate practices in their own words and sequence. As Kallio et al. (2016) note, semi-structured interviews are highly effective in qualitative research because they provide enough structure to ensure essential topics are covered while allowing participants to expand freely, probe deeper into emerging themes, clarify responses, and engage in reflective storytelling. This approach was essential for documenting cultural practices and capturing nuanced, context-specific insights across multiple cases or barangays in a multi-case study design.

The interview guide was carefully crafted based on the study's research questions, relevant literature on indigenous justice systems, and Kibungan's socio-cultural context. Questions were open-ended and conversational to help participants feel comfortable sharing their knowledge of traditional conflict resolution systems and the influences of globalization. Before field deployment, experts familiar with qualitative research and indigenous studies validated the interview guide to ensure appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and clarity. Data collection proceeded after obtaining written informed consent from each individual participant. With permission, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and organized by case to support within-case and cross-case analysis.

Data Gathering Procedures

Before data collection, the researcher secured the necessary permissions and clearances from the appropriate academic and local authorities. The researcher also coordinated with barangay officials, indigenous representatives, elders, and other community gatekeepers. The researcher conducted preliminary visits to introduce the study, explain its purpose, establish rapport, and ensure the research process respected applicable community and cultural protocols. During the preparatory stage, the researcher finalized the researcher-made semi-structured interview guide following expert validation. The researcher coordinated the schedule, location, and manner of the interviews with participants to ensure their availability, privacy, comfort, and observance of relevant community protocols. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the six selected participants, with two participants representing each of the three cases: Poblacion, Sagpat, and Madaymen. The interviews focused on participants' knowledge and experiences regarding indigenous conflict resolution, the role of elders and community institutions, the interaction between customary and formal systems, and changes in these practices associated with local manifestations of globalization.

Before each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and the participant's right to withdraw without penalty. The researcher obtained written informed consent before the interview began. With participants' permission, the researcher audio-recorded interviews to ensure accurate documentation of their responses. The researcher also took field notes to record relevant contextual observations and key points that arose during the interviews. The researcher maintained cultural sensitivity throughout the data collection process, particularly when participants discussed customary practices, rituals, community values, ancestral knowledge, and sensitive disputes. The researcher also avoided treating indigenous practices as static or uniform and instead allowed participants to explain how practices differed across communities and how they had changed over time. After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. The researcher reviewed the transcripts against the recordings to ensure accuracy. The researcher used pseudonyms or participant codes to protect participants' identities. The researcher organized the transcripts by case to support both within-case and cross-case analysis. The researcher then reviewed the transcribed data for inconsistencies and clarified details with participants as needed through follow-up communication. The transcripts were prepared for analysis in line with case study qualitative research principles, allowing themes, patterns, and variations across cases to emerge. All records, including consent forms, field notes, and digital files, were stored in secure, password-protected storage accessible only to the researcher.

Treatment of Data

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the principles developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021; Byrne, 2022). The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to analyze the semi-structured interview data. This approach was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to identify and interpret patterned meanings across participants' accounts while recognizing the researcher's active role in the analytic

process and preserving the contextual richness of each case. Analysis was conducted both within cases – capturing the distinct contexts of Poblacion, Sagpat, and Madaymen – and across cases to highlight commonalities, differences, and variations in how Indigenous conflict resolution was described and adapted to contemporary influences.

The process began with familiarization through repeated reading and listening to transcripts, followed by systematic coding of relevant passages. Codes included traditional mediation, elders' roles, community agreements, sanctions, rituals, documentation, monetary settlement, religious influence, education, migration, government intervention, and adaptation of practices. These codes were then clustered into broader categories and potential themes, such as indigenous conflict resolution and adaptation to formal systems.

The team reviewed themes for coherence, then refined and defined them based on their central concepts and relevance to the research questions. Particular attention was given to how local manifestations of globalization – formal education, Christianity, government laws, economic changes, migration, media, and technology – were perceived as influencing customary practices. The final report integrated these themes into a coherent narrative, supported by participant quotations and interpreted in relation to relevant literature and Kibungan's sociocultural context.

Because participants were elders, indigenous representatives, barangay officials, and Lupon members, the findings reflect institutional and cultural perspectives rather than the lived experiences of ordinary litigants. The authors acknowledged this boundary throughout to avoid overstating representativeness. Overall, the analysis revealed how indigenous conflict resolution practices in Kibungan have been preserved, modified, and integrated with formal mechanisms, with globalization shaping both shared patterns and barangay-specific differences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to conducting the study in the indigenous communities of Kibungan, Benguet. The researcher recognized that research involving indigenous knowledge required not only individual informed consent but also respect for community authority, cultural protocols, and ancestral boundaries. Before data collection, the researcher secured the necessary institutional permissions and coordinated with local government officials, community elders, indigenous representatives, and tribal council elders to ensure the research activities were acceptable and culturally appropriate. In addition to obtaining individual informed consent from participants, the researcher secured verbal consent from the tribal council elders for documenting and writing up information on indigenous rituals and customary practices. The elders were consulted specifically about which aspects of rituals could be described, documented, and included in the research manuscript and which information should remain restricted or excluded. This consultation mattered because not all indigenous knowledge is appropriate for public documentation or academic dissemination.

We took particular care with sacred prayers and ritual expressions. The tribal council elders identified specific sacred prayers and portions of ritual knowledge as culturally restricted and connected to ancestral boundaries. The research manuscript did not transcribe, quote, translate, or reproduce these sacred prayers, even when they were mentioned or performed during discussions of customary practices. The researcher recorded and reported only information the elders considered appropriate for academic documentation. The researcher therefore treated the boundaries the elders established as an ethical limitation on what could be included in the written study.

The researcher also obtained informed consent from individual participants before their interviews. The researcher explained the study's purpose, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and participants' right to refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study. Participants were informed that they could decline to discuss cultural practices or information that they considered sensitive, private, or sacred.

Confidentiality and privacy received particular attention because Kibungan communities are relatively close-knit, and disclosing personal information or participation in a particular dispute could result in social consequences. Participant identities were therefore protected through pseudonyms or participant codes. Identifying information was removed from transcripts and the presentation of findings whenever necessary. Audio recordings, transcripts, consent documents, and other research materials were stored securely and accessible only to the researcher. The researcher reported information about sensitive disputes and personal experiences cautiously to

prevent unnecessary identification or harm to participants.

The researcher also maintained cultural sensitivity throughout the data-gathering and interpretation processes. The researcher respected the authority of elders, tribal council members, indigenous representatives, and community leaders, particularly in matters involving customary law, rituals, ancestral knowledge, and community traditions. The researcher avoided treating indigenous practices as merely research material and instead recognized them as living cultural knowledge belonging to the community. Furthermore, the researcher avoided misrepresenting, commodifying, or unnecessarily disclosing indigenous knowledge. When participants described practices that had changed over time, the researcher presented these accounts within their cultural and community context rather than judging them solely by external or formal legal standards. The researcher also distinguished between information that could appropriately be analyzed academically and knowledge that the community considered restricted.

These ethical safeguards ensured that the study respected both individual autonomy and collective cultural authority. The decision to exclude specific sacred prayers and restricted ritual details was not considered a loss of data but rather an ethical obligation to respect ancestral boundaries and the community's authority over its cultural knowledge. Through consultation with tribal council elders, informed consent, confidentiality, and culturally responsive research practices, the study sought to document indigenous conflict resolution practices without compromising the cultural integrity, dignity, and rights of the Kibungan community.

Results and Discussion

This section serves as the study's core analytical component, transforming raw narratives into meaningful interpretations to examine how traditional conflict resolution practices in Kibungan, Benguet, are sustained, challenged, and transformed. To ground this analysis, the study utilizes data gathered from a purposive sample of six key informants. This highly experienced demographic, aged 49 to 63 and representing both male and female perspectives across the agricultural barangays of Poblacion, Sagpat, and Madaymen, was intentionally selected to capture a holistic view of the local legal landscape. Crucially, these informants bridge the structural gap between indigenous tribal governance and formal state justice systems, allowing the analysis to look at the data through three distinct operational frameworks: traditional customary experts, formal barangay justice actors, and institutional bridges. The traditional customary framework is anchored by P.1, a male informant from Poblacion whose background in the traditional council of elders and long-term participation in the *Tongtong* system highlights the enduring reliance on ancestral practices. Conversely, the evolving role of the state-mandated system is captured through Lupon Tagapamayapa members P.3, P.4, and P.5. Notably, the female informants within this subset (P.4, aged 49; P.5, aged 63) provide a unique look into institutional transition, having served as long-time public witnesses to traditional elder-led disputes before transitionally stepping into official roles as state-recognized Lupon mediators. Finally, P.2 and P.6 serve as institutional bridges, as designated Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives (IPMR) within the local governance structure. By analyzing these combined perspectives through the lenses of Social Exchange Theory, Restorative Justice Theory, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), the subsequent sections interpret these findings not as static traditions, but as dynamic interactions between cultural preservation and modern adaptation. These frameworks allow the study to move beyond mere description and uncover how deeply embedded concepts of relationships, reciprocity, cultural identity, and social harmony shape conflict resolution outcomes in Kibungan's evolving socio-legal environment.

Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices of Kibungan Benguet

The findings for this research question indicate that, based on the observations and experiences shared by the barangay officials and indigenous representatives in Kibungan, traditional conflict resolution is primarily characterized by dialogue (*tongtong*), the authority of elders, ritual practices, and indigenous values. Participants consistently described these themes as central to their conflict resolution processes, suggesting that, within the institutional context of this study, conflict resolution extends beyond procedural settlement and is closely tied to cultural identity, moral principles, and communal relationships.

Dialogue-Based Settlement (*Tongtong*)

This theme describes *tongtong* as the primary indigenous approach to resolving disputes through dialogue, negotiation, and elder-facilitated collective discussion. Based on the participants' accounts, *tongtong* was

consistently presented as a process that prioritizes communication, mutual understanding, and consensus in addressing conflicts, rather than relying solely on adversarial confrontation or rigid legal procedures.

All participants explained in detail that:

"Tongtongen adi, sidoy di general ay term na say indigenous way of settlement," (Tongtong (dialogue/discussion) is the general term for the indigenous way of settlement, indicating that tongtong is the overarching process used in resolving disputes) (P.6).

"No waday kaman apa adi et tongtongen adi din elders... Di yat das di imbestigaren da adi mo sino di manriri, sino di gapu" (If there is a dispute, it is brought to the elders for tongtong. They investigate the root cause and identify who is at fault, and then they talk to both parties until they reach an agreement), demonstrating the procedural aspect of dialogue and investigation (P.1).

"Mostly et amicable settlement through a customary laws... din esa et din tongtong wada din rituals ay maamag to." (Mostly it is an amicable settlement through customary laws... tongtong and rituals are performed) (P.2).

Based on participants' narratives, tongtong was described as a collaborative problem-solving process in which both parties actively engaged in resolving disputes. Within the institution observed, this approach encouraged openness, reduced hostility, and promoted mutually accepted agreements, contributing to compliance with resolutions. Compared with formal legal processes, tongtong was perceived to provide space for individuals to voice concerns, negotiate outcomes, and restore relationships. In this institutional context, these observations suggest that tongtong fosters community cohesion by reinforcing values of respect, fairness, accountability, and collective responsibility.

In Benguet, *Tongtong* functions as a culturally embedded form of dispute resolution in which elders facilitate dialogue, identify the underlying causes of disputes, and guide parties toward settlement (Balatong et al., 2022). More recent evidence among Kalanguya Indigenous Peoples likewise documents *Tongtong* as a culturally informed practice for resolving agricultural land disputes (Ballagan & Nuval, 2026).

These observations also resonate with Social Exchange Theory, which highlights the role of cooperative interaction in resolving tension, and Restorative Justice Theory, which emphasizes reconciliation and restoring social relationships over punitive measures. Broader justice scholarship supports these results, showing that dialogue-based community mediation addresses the social and emotional dimensions of conflict, preserves interpersonal relationships, and maintains strong local legitimacy (Boege et al., 2020; Forsyth, 2020; Llewellyn & Morrison, 2021; Shortland, 2022).

Council of Elders as the Primary Decision-Making Authority

This theme highlights the council of elders as central to dispute resolution, drawing on customary law, wisdom, and lived experience. Participants consistently linked leadership and decision-making to cultural legitimacy, communal trust, and experiential knowledge rather than formal legal training. Their accounts suggest that elders' authority rests on long-standing practices and shared cultural values.

Participants provided detailed insights:

"...council of elders di mangtongtong... wada din kanan da ay council of elders daida di mangresolve sin conflict." (...the council of elders handles the discussion... they are the ones who resolve the conflict), highlighting their central role in decision-making (P.2).

"Nu sin kaugalian gamin ngay yan baken osto sa ay maisurat tan din maadal sa, din naob-oberbar sin inam-amag di aapo." (It wasn't exactly written down; it was learned through observing what the ancestors did), indicating that knowledge is transmitted through observation and practice (P.6).

Participants also emphasized the use of *tulagan*, an agreement understood by both parties in the local dialect (P.2). *"...ngem no waday agreement Memorandum of agreement MOA kanana, (Memorandum of understanding (MOU) uno sin us usaren di council of elders gamin "tulagan" kanan da. Sinaey din tulagan mausar din dialect ay mabalin ay maawatan din both parties ah,"* (...but if there is an agreement, it is called a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), a

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or what the council of elders specifically refers to as a *Tulagan*. This *Tulagan* (binding agreement) is written in the local dialect so both parties can clearly understand it.)

Participants perceived the council of elders as a trusted authority whose decisions drew on cultural knowledge, life experience, and moral integrity. Participants respected their decisions because they reflected community values and norms. In this study's institutional context, these observations suggest that elders' involvement shaped conflict resolution in ways participants considered culturally appropriate and responsive to local circumstances, while also transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger members through observation and participation.

These accounts are supported by Isser (2021), who noted the legitimacy of customary authorities in rural communities, and Reyes and Arias (2024), who found indigenous leadership promotes compliance when decisions are grounded in shared values. Ubink (2021) likewise observed that elder-based systems provide flexible, context-sensitive approaches that complement formal legal processes, while Briggs (2023) emphasized their role in preserving cultural identity and strengthening cohesion. Collectively, these studies corroborate participants' observations on the continuing relevance of the council of elders in local dispute resolution.

Ritual Practices for Conflict Prevention and Reconciliation

This theme highlights rituals such as *manmanok*, *sabosab*, *bunong*, *ngilin*, and *pugog* as integral to conflict resolution. Participants perceived these practices as extending resolution beyond settlement by incorporating spiritual, symbolic, and relational dimensions. They consistently described the rituals as mechanisms for reconciliation, affirming agreements, and restoring community harmony.

Beyond the initial settlement of disputes, participants explained that specific rituals rebuild interpersonal relationships, particularly through *Sabosab*. According to Participant 2, *Sabosab* is conducted after conflicts involving siblings or family members have been resolved to signify genuine reconciliation and the removal of resentment: "*Sabosab – esa sa ay ritual ay di laydena ay kalien mo din mankabsat ya nan-ayos da*" (*Sabosab* is a ritual for siblings to reconcile... the hatred is removed), highlighting its role in restoring relationships. Further detail was provided regarding the ceremony (P.2): "*Sabosab – esa sa ay ritual ay di laydena ay kalien mo din mankabsat ya nan-ayos da... manparti da si baboy, upat di siki na... man-ayos da na et laton adi dan mansitesitem, eenggay din gurang-gura yan makaan,*" (*Sabosab* is a ritual for siblings to reconcile... they slaughter a four-legged pig... they reconcile so they won't backbite each other, and the hatred is removed. In this ritual, a pig is butchered and divided specifically into four parts, based on its four legs, after which an elder (*lakay*) performs a prayer over the offering.) The blood and bile of the pig are mixed together and stirred; once cooked, both parties who were in conflict are called to participate as the elder offers a prayer, saying: "Now that you have reconciled, may you no longer bring up past conflicts. May all anger and resentment be removed."

Building upon this reconciliation, the process moves toward personal and communal gratitude through the practice of *Manmanok*. Once they return to their homes, both parties, or specifically those who believe in the traditions, perform rituals in their respective residences to celebrate the resolution. This practice is captured in the following account (P.2): "*no sumaa sin beey na abe, wada abe di rituals ay amagen da sin beey na din both parties, baken din both parties, no adi na patien ngem no din mamati pay ay sidoy di naamag aydoy yan kanana en nabanol ay kanana en panswelte ana, amagena sin beey na pay abe et siya din doy ayaganaan kaaruba tan umali kayo tan nay nanngangalat kami yan mayat ay waday result na et umali kayo, kaman di laydena ay kalien thanksgiving, mabalin ay mo sin thanksgiving mabalin ay no kanana maikararag, uno way ayaganas lakay ay mangiluwalo, siya din kanan da ay manmanok.*" this means: (...when they return to their homes, both parties or specifically those who believe in the traditions perform rituals in their respective residences. If a person believes that the resolution was successful and will bring good fortune, they will perform a ritual at home and invite their neighbors to join them. They do this to celebrate the positive outcome of the dispute settlement. It is essentially a form of thanksgiving. During this thanksgiving, they may offer a prayer or invite an elder to lead the prayer (*mangiluwalo*). This practice is what they refer to as *manmanok* (a ritual involving a chicken).)

Furthermore, the resolution process is fortified by additional practices that serve as public declarations and spiritual safeguards. Practices such as *ngilin* (sacred rest) where P2 cited that, "...way ngilin na di ngem din edwani kadi et baken unay Kadin sursuruten din enggay sat awnit mansukat buwan, mod oy et si kabigatana et doy et ay manda-op ka yan nelpas en din ngilin." (...there is a sacred restriction (*ngilin*) for that, but nowadays, it is not strictly followed like before when it would take a month; now, as soon as the next morning comes and you wash your face (*manda-*

op), the ngilin is considered finished). In addition to the practices, *bunong* (indigenous prayer) and *pugog* (witnessing ritual) were also mentioned as part of the reconciliation process. Specifically, in the practice of *Pugog*, a pig is butchered, and neighbors are invited as witnesses to confirm that the land has already been sold and fully paid. This serves as a public declaration of the transaction, ensuring that if disputes arise in the future, those who attended can testify that the land was sold and validated through the *pugog* ritual, according to P.2.

Participants perceived ritual practices as extending conflict resolution beyond legal settlement by addressing emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. They described these rituals as providing closure, reinforcing agreements through shared beliefs, and encouraging accountability through moral responsibility. In the institutional context of this study, they viewed these practices as fostering harmony, sustaining acceptance of resolutions, and transmitting indigenous knowledge to younger members.

These observations are consistent with prior studies: Hayashi and Mburu (2020) noted that rituals promote emotional healing and strengthen reconciliation; Kurian (2023) emphasized their role in embedding agreements within cultural and spiritual frameworks; Macdonald (2021) found symbolic acts enhance compliance through moral significance; and Daly (2020) argued that restorative rituals contribute to lasting peace by facilitating healing and reintegration. Collectively, these studies corroborate participants' accounts and align with Restorative Justice Theory and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which emphasize healing, balance, reconciliation, and community harmony.

Inayan and Indigenous Values as Ethical Framework

This theme centers on *inayan* and related values such as *lawa* and *paniyew* as moral principles guiding individual behavior. Participants described these values as shaping how community members regulate actions and relationships. Within the institutional context of this study, participants perceived conflict prevention as rooted in internalized ethical standards and shared cultural beliefs rather than external enforcement or formal legal mechanisms.

Participant explained:

"Fathers and mothers knew what they called inayan, especially among siblings... we should not be fighting," emphasizing its role in guiding behavior (P.5).

Related concepts such as *lawa* (forbidden) and *paniyew* (taboo) further reinforce moral discipline within the community. One participant elaborated, *"din nay ay mae-apply ay nay kaman values na ah, tan din nay values gamin ay nay nanipud ed idi wada din kanan da ay values, wada ngay din kanan da ay inayan, mo din inayan aydoy 'adi ka man-am-amag tan inayan', yan din nay inayan ay nay sinay din term ay inayan adi ka amagen tan iilan da kad ngato, inayan kanan da, inayan di. Di esa ay values din lawa, 'adi ka am-amagen di tan lawa' ammom ngarud ay lawa yan amagem, isunga ammom ay lawlawadi ka amagen isunga lawa, di esa din paniyew, no amagen ya asi way ibaga da en sik-a et uno engka am-amagen di yan, no ngay koma din manngilngilin ka kamanadi yan duwan kan man-am-amag si lawa, siya din paniyew kanan da."* P.2. (These concepts are applied as values; these values have existed since the olden days. There is what they call *Inayan*; the value of *inayan* means 'do not do that because it is *inayan*. *Inayan* means you should not do [something bad] because someone above is watching you. Another value is *Lawa*; do not do that because it is *lawa*. You know it is wrong (*lawa*), yet you still do it; so if you know it is bad, do not do it because it is *lawa*. Another is *Paniyew*; if you do something [forbidden] and they say something to you, or if you are currently observing a sacred restriction (*ngilin*) and then you do something bad, that is what they call *paniyew*.) P.2

In this study, *inayan* functions as a preventive mechanism, shaping individual behavior through fear of wrongdoing and respect for others. This reduces the need for formal conflict resolution because internal moral standards guide individuals. Moreover, it promotes social harmony by aligning individual actions with collective values. This system demonstrates that ethical behavior is deeply embedded in cultural beliefs and practices.

Briggs (2023) found that indigenous moral systems are highly effective in maintaining social order and preventing conflict. Ubink (2021) emphasized that cultural values reduce dependence on formal legal systems by promoting self-regulation. Forsyth (2020) noted that moral norms play a crucial role in preventing disputes in customary societies. Additionally, Sillitoe (2021) highlighted that indigenous ethical systems contribute to long-term community stability by reinforcing shared values.

Effects of Globalization on the Conflict-Handling Practices of Barangay Officials and Indigenous Representatives

The findings indicate that barangay officials and indigenous representatives perceived globalization as shaping their conflict-handling practices through education and media exposure, religious change, legal awareness, adversarial thinking, economic modernization, and declining reliance on traditional practices. Within the institutional context of this study, participants viewed globalization as presenting both challenges and opportunities that have altered how conflicts are understood, managed, and resolved alongside customary approaches.

Education and Media Exposure

This theme highlights how formal education and media influence younger generations' views on traditional conflict resolution. Participants observed that these influences introduce alternative perspectives, driving many youth to favor formal legal mechanisms over customary practices.

As two participants noted regarding the shift away from tradition:

"enggay nan-skwela da din uubbing enggay adi da et bigbigen din kaman da sa kaman din kultura ay inyaat da ay nangsosolve si dispute, resolution adi da unay bigbigen karkaro no din uubing di waday makaskaso enggay et ay ed wani et yan e-apply dan linteg." (P.2). (The youth have already gone to school, and they no longer recognize or acknowledge the traditional culture used in solving disputes. They no longer recognize those resolutions, especially when youth are involved in a case; they immediately want to apply formal [national] law.)

"ed wani ay manbuybuya da sin ay anukan di nenews yan 'ay kamanadi batw di anuka?' ... mejo e apply da di." (They watch the news and try to apply those outside ways), showing how media exposure influences their perception of conflict resolution (P.3).

These narratives illustrate a growing challenge in intergenerational knowledge transmission. As fewer young people engage with customary conflict handling, opportunities to learn directly from elders diminish, potentially threatening the long-term continuity of these practices.

These findings align with recent scholarship emphasizing the difficulty of sustaining Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) amid modern social shifts. For instance, Colicola (2024) stresses the need for culture-sensitive educational approaches that respect Indigenous worldviews, while Reginio et al. (2024) advocate rigorous documentation and creative revitalization strategies. Safeguarding this intangible cultural heritage ultimately depends on intentional intergenerational transmission and targeted youth awareness (UNESCO, 2022).

Christianization Transforming Rituals

This theme covers how Christianity influences the modification or replacement of indigenous rituals in conflict resolution. Participants reported that Christian beliefs shaped how some community members perceive and practice traditional rituals, leading to varied approaches in integrating customary and Christian practices.

Participants shared:

"Since the people have been Christianized, they now know how to pray directly to the Lord," indicating a shift from traditional rituals to Christian practices (P.4). She continued that, *"nu il-ilan takod wani talaga ay adayo pay adi ay mayat din kinakirsityano... mabalin met ay amagen yu san ritual di kaugalian basta din panintasan, panbiayagan ya kai-amagan/kaisingpa-an di kaipu-ipugaw...asi ed wani enggay ewed da din lalakay ay angin ammo ay mangi-amag... sin kaugalian, depende no sin ipugaw ngay ket ammo na di kaugalian mabalin mo ay ibaga iman et mae-apply, ngem nu adi na ammo ayket useless adi, nu ipilit mo iman keta di na paiten di, depende sin pammati tan mo mamati ka ket maiamag di ayket mayat ngem no adim metlang mamati yan e-am-amag da awan adi maga, depende sin pammati."* (If we look at it now, Christianity is truly far-reaching and good... you can still perform the traditional rituals as long as they are for the purpose of cleansing, livelihood, and the betterment or peace of the people... but nowadays, the elders who have the knowledge to perform these rituals are gone... regarding customs, it depends on the person; if they know the customs, you can suggest them, and they can be applied. But if they do not know them, it is useless. If you force it, it will only turn out bitter. It depends on faith; if you believe, then performing the ritual is good, but if you don't believe in what they are doing, nothing will come of it. It all depends on faith.)

“The manmanok (chicken ritual) is already being replaced because people are now Christians, showing the gradual decline of ritual practices (P.6).

While varied, these accounts show that participants observed Christianization influencing traditional rituals in their communities. They perceived that while some rituals have been replaced by Christian practices, others continue to be observed by those maintaining traditional beliefs or adapted to coexist with Christian teachings. They saw these changes as ongoing adjustments in conflict-handling practices, negotiated according to individual faith, community acceptance, and the presence of elders knowledgeable in customary rituals. Participants also noted that differences in religious beliefs may affect the continued practice and transmission of indigenous ritual knowledge.

Evidence from Doyle (2020) suggests that religious conversion often reshapes indigenous practices by introducing new moral frameworks. Kurian (2023) emphasized that religious transformation can both challenge and enrich traditional conflict resolution systems. In another study, Haynes (2021) noted that Christianity often redefines indigenous rituals while selectively integrating them. Furthermore, Taringa (2020) highlighted that religious pluralism creates both conflict and opportunities for adaptation within indigenous communities. These studies show that religious influence is a significant factor in cultural transformation. Nonetheless this reflects Indigenous Knowledge Systems as dynamic and adaptive, and aligns with Restorative Justice Theory, as both systems aim to restore harmony despite differing spiritual frameworks.

Increased Legal Awareness and Fear of Lawsuits

This theme highlights the growing awareness of formal laws and legal rights and its influence on conflict-handling practices. Participants reported that increased legal awareness has shaped how barangay officials and indigenous representatives approach dispute resolution, particularly in documentation, decision-making, and compliance with legal procedures.

Participants explained:

“Karkaro ngarud no din kaso iman yan ad-adoy linteg na karkaro din VAWC, way child abuse... ammo da din ad-adoy linteg na yan.” (Cases now have many specific laws like VAWC... they are aware of many laws now,” indicating increased legal knowledge) (P.2).

“ed wani maga ngay di egyat da, natured da ed wani tan mabalin ay itapi da ka et ay kaso-an... isunga din mairecord yan ta pang safety.” (People are no longer afraid; they are bold and might even include you in a lawsuit... that’s why recording is for safety), showing fear of legal repercussions (P.6).

This pattern of storytelling reinforces the notion, based on participants’ observations, that greater awareness of legal rights and laws has encouraged the adoption of more formal procedures, particularly documentation and record-keeping, to protect both parties and officials in dispute resolution. They perceived that this legal consciousness has made barangay officials and indigenous representatives more cautious because of possible complaints or liability. These changes were seen to influence customary conflict resolution by requiring greater consideration of formal standards while still applying indigenous practices where appropriate. Documentation was also noted as an important safeguard for transparency and accountability.

Sandefur and Siddiqi (2022) found that legal awareness increases reliance on formal justice systems. OECD (2021) emphasized that access to legal information transforms how communities resolve disputes. World Bank (2020) noted that legal pluralism creates both opportunities and tensions between formal and informal systems. Additionally, Ubink (2021) highlighted that increased legal consciousness reshapes customary practices by introducing formal accountability mechanisms.

Winner-Take-All Mentality

This theme characterizes the influence of adversarial legal systems that emphasize winning over reconciliation. It implies a shift away from communal harmony toward individualistic outcomes.

Participants stated:

"Winner take all adi, isunga enggana adi si anak mo yan manlalaban da sin anak da... engganas umapo enggana." (Winner take all destroys the harmony of the family... even your children will fight their children... it continues until the grandchildren), illustrating long-term consequences (P.2).

"...din doy laydena ay alan din ukan di ib-a na." (...that he wants to take what belongs to his fellow man.) P.5.

These descriptions show that adversarial systems prioritize individual victory over collective harmony, leading to prolonged conflict and damaged relationships. This contrasts sharply with traditional practices that emphasize reconciliation. As a result, conflicts may persist across generations, weakening community cohesion.

This aligns with Forsyth (2020), which found that adversarial justice systems often increase social fragmentation. World Bank (2020) highlighted that court-based systems can escalate conflicts in close-knit communities. Daly (2020) emphasized that restorative approaches are more effective in maintaining relationships. Additionally, Braithwaite (2001) argued that punitive systems fail to address the root causes of conflict. This contrasts with Restorative Justice Theory, which prioritizes healing and reconciliation.

Economic Changes and Modernization Benefits

This theme reflects the practical benefits of modernization, such as increased efficiency and reduced costs, suggesting a strategic shift toward more convenient and accessible conflict-resolution methods. A primary driver of this change is the shifting cultural and economic landscape. As one participant (P.1) shared: *"...kaman di nanbaliwana et nakaan din kaising, di odom wada din linteg di gobyerno wada di odom ay panbisanan da, wada abe di kaman nan-adal ay panubtuban da, di esa abe kaman nan kristyano di ipugaaw et adi enggay mai-apply di odom ay kaman ed bayag."* (...that is how it has changed; the sense of *kaising* (traditional bond/partnership) has diminished. Some now look to government laws as their basis, while others rely on their education as a guide. Also, because people have become Christians, some of the old ways from long ago are no longer applied.)

Complementing these cultural shifts is a significant economic transition regarding the "fines" or requirements used in settlements. Participant 1 further explained: *"Di essa kaman rinmigat din animal ed wani isunga maminimize din alan tan mo ed bayag pay enggay multa en das nuwang, busaang karo din mo tinongtong da si namindwa ket sin first ket manok enggay ipidwa da kano busaang no ipitlo da pay kano nuwang di alan da tan naad-ado da sat dakdake abe din alaen da."* (One factor is that animals have become expensive nowadays, so the requirements are minimized. In the past, the fine would be a carabao; if they met twice, the first would be a chicken, the second a pig (busaang), and by the third time, they would take a carabao because the more they met, the bigger the animal required.) This economic pressure has led to a more streamlined approach, with Participant 5 noting that while animals were used in the past, settlements are "now, strictly about money," and Participant 2 simply stating, "At least it is more economical."

Beyond material costs, the time efficiency of these processes has improved drastically. Participant 1 noted the contrast in duration: *"...ed idi waday madamag ay matongtong ay enggay ma 3 days ed wani magay ammok si natongtong si one day oras anggey yan makdeng."* (...Back then, you would hear of a *tongtong* that may last for three days; now, I don't know of any that last long usually, it's finished in just one day or a few hours.) Furthermore, modernization has introduced moderation and legal recognition. Participant 6 highlighted the influence of globalization in balancing demands: *"Benefits din nay globalization waday linmag-anana tan mo dengngen mi et no kaman angsan iman din daawaten di esa wada iman sin mangtongtong adi iman ay mangpasal, 'aga sobra iman sa' kamanadi et e adjust."* (The benefit of globalization is that it has made things lighter; when we listen to the case and see that one party is asking for too much, the mediator can now intervene and say, 'That is too excessive,' and then they adjust it.) This integration is further evidenced by Participant 2, who mentioned that "The courts now recognize the term *pugog*," signaling a bridge between traditional concepts and modern legal systems.

These accounts from participants' point of view indicate that modernization enhances accessibility and reduces the economic burden of conflict resolution. However, it also simplifies practices, potentially reducing their cultural depth. While efficiency improves, the symbolic and relational aspects of traditional practices may diminish.

Recent studies support the shift from ritual livestock fines to monetary compensation and the improved efficiency of indigenous justice systems. Balatong et al. (2022) documented *tongtong* in Bakun, Benguet, as an elder-

mediated dispute-resolution process involving dialogue, negotiation, advice, and settlement. Their findings show that the practice remains relevant in addressing land, family, marital, and community disputes. Likewise, Participants described a shift from traditional forms of settlement toward more practical and flexible arrangements. This suggests that customary conflict resolution has adapted to contemporary economic and social conditions while retaining its broader objective of restoring community harmony.

Declining Belief in Traditional Practices

This theme describes participants' declining belief in traditional conflict resolution practices. Based on their accounts, some community members, particularly younger individuals, showed less confidence in customary practices, which influenced their willingness to participate in or comply with traditional conflict resolution processes.

Participants stated:

"wada ladtan maga, 'awan adak mamati sa" (Some still say, I don't believe that) (P.3).

"the youth just reply, 'That was only for the old days'... it's as if their minds are closed [to tradition]." (The youth just reply, 'That was only for the old days'... their minds are closed), reflecting resistance toward traditional practices (P.5). The participant continued, *"ed wani tanmo din kaugalian pay adi et "aytoan sa" ambot in bisaya kanan da adi, no din uubing ed wani."* (In these present times, if we're inculcating the old customs, they just say, 'whatever'. That is how the youth are now.)

Participants also expressed concern that differences in beliefs between older and younger members may affect the continued observance of traditions and elders' role in conflict resolution. These observations are consistent with recent Philippine scholarship emphasizing the challenges of sustaining Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices amid changing social contexts. Colicola (2024) argued that Indigenous knowledge Integration requires approaches that respect indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems, heritage, and identity. Similarly, Reginio et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices through research, documentation, and culturally grounded initiatives. More recently, Tanabe et al. (2026) highlighted tensions between indigenous cosmologies and state legal and governance frameworks in the Cordillera and other Philippine Indigenous communities.

Strategies of Barangay Officials and Indigenous Representatives to Strengthen, Preserve, and Adapt Traditional Conflict Resolution in the Face of Globalization

This section outlines the strategies barangay officials and indigenous representatives in Kibungan, Benguet, use to preserve and adapt traditional conflict resolution amid globalization. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, four themes emerged: Hybrid Processes and Inculturation, Documentation Imperatives, Educational Strategies, and Institutional Support Mechanisms. Collectively, these themes reflect practical measures adopted to sustain indigenous conflict resolution while responding to changing social, cultural, and legal contexts.

Hybrid Processes and Inculturation

This theme highlights how barangay officials and indigenous representatives integrate formal governmental structures with traditional conflict resolution. Participants noted that customary norms are adapted to complement formal procedures, allowing traditional practices to remain relevant while meeting contemporary governance and legal requirements.

Participants highlighted the importance of combining formal and informal processes. A participant stated, "Combine informal (elders) and formal (barangay) processes," emphasizing the need for cooperation between traditional leaders and local government. Another noted, *"No mabalin ay e-adapt mo sa no dengngen da... ngem no ipadas mo ya dengngen da mabalin ay e apply mo din customary laws..."* (If possible, you adapt it if they listen... you can still apply the customary laws...) (P2), suggesting that adaptation ensures the continuity of traditions even when circumstances change. A third participant reflected on the adjustment of excessive customs: *"Di esa din inculturation ay kanan da... nu din doy enggay pay iman ay sobra/nadagsen ay et say kaanen adi."* (One thing is what they call inculturation... if a custom is already too excessive or heavy, it has to be removed or adjusted.) P6, highlighting the community's commitment to both cultural integrity and fairness.

While modernization has introduced efficiency, the core of the resolution process remains rooted in the wisdom of ancestral practices, particularly in sensitive family matters. As Participant 5 (P.5) explained, the application of tradition is often dictated by the specific nature of the conflict: *"...depende adi sin ilaen mi ay kaso, kaman dindoy kas pangarigan di matongtong sidi ya din loten di mankakabatat ya adi dan mankikinaawatan, siya din eamag tako sa sin inam-amag di inmun-una ed idi ta baken koman say sursurutan din sumarsaruno."* (It depends on the case we are looking at; for example, if we are mediating a land dispute between siblings who do not understand each other, we apply what was done by those who came before us in the past, so that it serves as a guide for them to follow.) This suggests that the old customs are not merely rituals but are strategic frameworks designed to provide a clear path for future generations to resolve similar disagreements.

However, this adherence to tradition is not rigid; it is guided by pragmatism and the ultimate goal of community peace. The system allows for the selective adaptation of customs based on their effectiveness in the current context. Another participant (P.4) added: *"basta di kanan mis kaugalian gamin no sino di mayat ay kaisimpan di esa et sya di e adapt, ngem no din lawlawwa ay dumagsenan din problema maga adi."* (Regarding our customs, whatever is good for the peace and resolution of the person is what we adapt; but if it is a bad practice that will only worsen the problem, then we do not [use it].) This indicates a sophisticated, evaluative approach to customary law, where the primary objective is the "peace and resolution of the person" rather than the blind following of historical protocol.

Based on these narratives, participants observed that combining customary and formal conflict resolution processes enables them to respond to contemporary disputes while continuing to apply culturally familiar practices where appropriate. They perceived that adapting selected customs, rather than applying them rigidly, allows indigenous conflict resolution to remain relevant within the current legal and social environment. They viewed hybrid approaches as practical strategies for balancing traditions with formal governance while maintaining community acceptance of conflict resolution processes.

A.M. Tapia (2019) supports integrating barangay ordinances with customary laws, finding that hybrid governance enhances legitimacy, compliance, and conflict resolution while preserving cultural identity. Likewise, Llorin (2020) and Balangue (2018) emphasized that combining formal and traditional mechanisms improves dispute resolution without abandoning indigenous practices. Indigenous customary mechanisms do not necessarily operate in complete isolation from formal legal systems. In the Philippine context, Indigenous communities negotiate among customary law, national law, and Indigenous rights frameworks, illustrating the continuing character of legal pluralism (Prill-Brett, 1994, 2007).

The selective adaptation of indigenous justice systems is also supported by recent studies. Dalog (2021) explained that indigenous laws remain effective because elders continuously modify or discard practices that no longer benefit the community, consistent with P.4's observation. Similarly, Sali-em and Baguilat (2023) found that elders rely on ancestral precedent in resolving sibling land disputes, reinforcing moral authority while adapting customary practices to contemporary realities.

Educational Strategies

This theme meant the efforts of barangay officials and indigenous representatives to transmit indigenous knowledge through youth engagement, formal educational initiatives such as Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities, and the use of historical cases as learning resources. Participants perceived these strategies as vital for passing customary knowledge to younger generations and promoting the continuity of traditional conflict resolution.

Participants emphasized including youth in traditional processes as a primary educational strategy. One stated, *"Wada metlang danan youth ay en makidedenge..."* (Youth are now allowed to listen) (P.1), while the participant explained, *"Ed wani enggay ka e-open da ta dengngen kanu din aanak"* (Involved parties allow their children to listen so they can learn for the future) (P.1), emphasizing observation as a first step in learning. A participant highlighted continuity, stating, *"Siya din eamag tako sa sin inam-amag di inmun-una ed idi ta koman say sursurutan din sumarsaruno"* (We do what the ancestors did so the next generation has something to follow) (P.5). Participants also recognized formal educational methods: *"Sin kultura ed nabaon say isuro sin uubing ah, kaman mo anuka IEC kanana di, isuro ta din kultura ay danay adalen din uubing..."* (The culture from the past should be taught to the youth, like what they call IEC; teach the culture so the youth can study it...) (P.3). Historical examples were cited as teaching tools: *"Nu din da sana [records] asi pay say e cite si example lalo nu kaparparehas na san makaso et ta bareng adi ya say mangsulbar abe*

et say yat na di ay mapreserve abe din ay kultura." (Those records are cited as examples, especially if a new case is similar, so that it can be solved the same way; that is how the culture is preserved) (P.6).

Participants noted that involving younger members in dispute settlement, conducting educational activities, and using historical cases are practical strategies for transmitting indigenous knowledge. These approaches provide opportunities for youth to learn customary values, conflict resolution skills, and traditions directly from elders and experienced practitioners. Participants emphasized that such educational strategies support the continuity of indigenous conflict resolution by promoting intergenerational learning and fostering greater appreciation of customary practices among the youth.

Following Cabugao (2020), youth engagement in indigenous councils strengthens both cultural understanding and active participation in governance. Tadiar (2018) highlighted mentorship programs as essential for transmitting dispute resolution skills and respect for customary law. T. Balangue (2018) noted that systematic education ensures continuity of traditions while enabling adaptation to contemporary challenges. Cabatingan (2021) emphasized that integrating historical examples into teaching practices preserves both practical skills and cultural values, reinforcing the community's collective memory. R. Llorin (2020) also found that youth involvement in cultural processes enhances social legitimacy and strengthens the continuity of indigenous governance structures.

Documentation Imperatives

This theme highlights participants' recognition of written records, handbooks, and publications as key strategies for preserving indigenous customs and conflict resolution practices. Participants saw documentation as a way to safeguard customary knowledge, support its transmission to future generations, and provide practical guidance for those involved in dispute resolution.

Participants expressed a strong need for formal documentation. One noted, *"Way kamayat ninan way mangidocument, waday manresearch ta no waday ibaga da isurat da and then basaen din uubing... maipreserve din kultura ay siked."* (It is good that there is documentation and research so that what is said is written down for the youth to read... so the good culture is preserved) (P.3). Another stated, *"Kailangan ay isurat ta way panbase an ton nu dumteng ti tiempo... sino din mayat ay kaugali-an siya koma di manretain."* (It is necessary to write it down so there is a basis when the time comes... whatever is good in the customs should be the ones we retain) (P.6), emphasizing the importance of recording exemplary practices. Regarding guidance for formal justice workers, a participant said, *"Dawdawatek lang nu way handbook... ta no wada koma di handbook di lupon ay suruta n ay mankaso ta baken ipilit din ammo..."* (I am requesting for a handbook... so that there is a guide for the Lupon to follow when handling cases, instead of just forcing what we personally know...) (P.4), adding that documentation provides *"ta waday ebidensya mi abe sin complainant ya respondent."* (...so that we have evidence to show the complainant and respondent) (P.4). Participants also supported compiling customs into books, noting, *"Mayat koma ay mailibro ta kaman pan-adalan din odom ay sumaruno..."* (It would be good if these beautiful customs were put into a book) (P.5).

These accounts show that documentation is a key strategy for preserving indigenous knowledge and sustaining customary conflict resolution. They perceived that written records, research outputs, handbooks, and books extend preservation beyond oral transmission, making knowledge more accessible to younger generations, barangay officials, and future indigenous leaders. They also viewed documentation as a practical way to promote consistency in applying customary practices, provide reference materials for dispute resolution, and strengthen cultural traditions amid changing social conditions.

Participants' accounts indicate that documentation serves as a strategy for preserving Indigenous Knowledge Systems and sustaining customary conflict-resolution practices. They perceived that written records, research outputs, handbooks, and books could extend knowledge transmission beyond oral communication and make customary practices more accessible to younger generations, barangay officials, and future indigenous leaders. This finding is consistent with Reginio et al. (2024), who emphasized research, documentation, and creative work as important approaches to revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices. Colicola (2024) likewise emphasized approaches that respect and sustain Indigenous knowledge, heritage, and cultural identity within contemporary institutions.

Institutional Support Mechanisms

This theme highlights participants' views on legal recognition, the formalization of the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) role, corrective mechanisms for violations of customary practices, and the transmission of indigenous values. These institutional mechanisms were perceived as vital for supporting the continuity of traditional conflict resolution within the contemporary governance system.

Participants highlighted the importance of legal recognition. One stated, "*Masapol ay di way IPMR na din musipyo ay wada di kanan da en Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) sat way CADT na tan mo magay CADT'm adi ka mabalin ay man anuk-a si IPMR tan sino ngen di imanage na?*" (The municipality must have a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title... if you don't have a CADT, you cannot have an IPMR because what would they manage?) (P.2). Regarding representation, a participant emphasized, "*Kailangan sat wada di mangirepresent sin indigenous people sin community uno sin munisipyo and then siya din IPMR.*" (It is necessary to have someone represent the indigenous people in the community or municipality, and that is the IPM) (P.2). Corrective mechanisms were also noted: "*No waday mangdadael ket itulukan da...*" (Those who disrupt traditions should be corrected) (P.1), while another highlighted continuity, stating, "*No awen da din naiyayaat... say yat na ay mareserve...*" (Good practices should be continued to preserve them) (P.1). Participants stressed values transmission: "*Baken takon iwassit di tan siya din nataguan tako... itauli tako din kaugalian basta baken takon ad-adapt en dindoy kaman manbunong et mayat met di.*" (We should not throw [tradition] away because it is where we came from... let's bring back the customs; as long as we aren't just following the chanter/priest blindly, it is good.) (P.5) and "*Ipasa sin sumarsaruno adi ta baken basta-basta ay kaanen adi.*" (Pass it on to the next generation because it shouldn't just be cast aside easily.) (P.6).

These descriptions show that Institutional Support Mechanisms reinforce traditional governance through legal, structural, and procedural legitimacy. CADTs provide formal recognition of indigenous territories, ensuring that IPMRs can operate effectively and protect customary rights. Corrective mechanisms maintain the integrity of traditions while encouraging adherence to community norms. Values transmission keeps customs relevant, bridges generational divides, and strengthens cultural resilience. This integration reflects Restorative Justice Theory, highlighting culturally aligned processes for accountability, reconciliation, and community harmony.

Moreover, Mangaoang (2019) emphasized that CADTs provide a legal foundation for indigenous governance, protecting customary practices from external interference. Sagun (2021) found that communities with formal recognition of IPMR authority demonstrate higher compliance with traditional conflict resolution practices. J. T. Balangue (2018) noted that institutional support enables communities to maintain corrective mechanisms while sustaining cultural relevance. Cabatingan (2021) highlighted that combining institutional frameworks with customary authority reinforces legitimacy, accountability, and continuity. Tapia (2019) observed that formal support improves conflict-resolution efficacy, particularly when traditional authority aligns with legal recognition.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the traditional conflict resolution system in Kibungan, Benguet, represents profound structural and philosophical resilience in the face of cultural globalization. Philosophically, this resilience is rooted in the community's non-static, adaptive view of their traditions and moral frameworks. The system's strength is anchored in the deeply internalized moral governance of inayan (fear of divine retribution), lawa (taboo), and paniyew (spiritual violation), which act as self-regulatory frameworks that prevent conflict before it escalates, alongside the relational restoration achieved through tongtong (dialogue) and ancestral reconciliation rituals like sabosab. Structurally, rather than being displaced by modernization, the customary system operates as a dynamic, hybrid legal pluralism. It continuously absorbs and integrates formal legal standards (such as written tulagan agreements and Lupon mediation) and religious transitions (selective Christian inculturation) to remain functional in a contemporary socio-legal landscape. Ultimately, the resilience of this traditional justice system is not found in static conservation, but in its philosophical flexibility and capacity to adapt its processes to contemporary realities while maintaining its core commitment to restoring interpersonal relationships and community harmony.

To translate these insights into actionable, specific policy, local government units (LGUs) must prioritize strengthening operational synergy between the Lupon Tagapamayapa (village peace mediators) and the local Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) framework under the Local Government Code of 1991

(Republic Act No. 7160). This should be realized through formal joint mediation guidelines, specific referral pathways, and co-mediation protocols that allow formal barangay justice and customary tongtong processes to complement, rather than compete with, each other. For educational implications, the findings must be translated into localized instructional materials and contextualized learning resources for the Department of Education's (DepEd) indigenous knowledge integration mandates (DepEd Order No. 66, s. 2016). These localized resources should explicitly integrate Kibungan's specific moral values (such as inayan) and historical mediation precedents into primary and secondary curricula to foster cultural identity, moral self-regulation, and intergenerational continuity among the youth.

However, these conclusions and their implications must be interpreted within the study's methodological limitations to avoid over-generalization. Because the findings come from a purposive sample of only six (6) key informants representing institutional gatekeepers in three specific barangays of Kibungan, they reflect localized institutional observations and professional narratives rather than a broad, structural fact for all indigenous communities in the Cordillera Administrative Region or the wider Philippines. The localized insights reflect how this specific mountain community negotiates continuity and adaptation under particular external pressures. Therefore, while these strategies provide a valuable and illustrative framework for customary resilience, broader qualitative and quantitative research is needed to confirm their applicability across diverse indigenous populations and cultural settings.

The study concludes that the indigenous conflict resolution system in Kibungan, Benguet, represents a profound structural resilience that transcends mere survival by actively negotiating with the forces of cultural globalization. This resilience is fundamentally philosophical, as the community does not view its traditions as static relics but as dynamic, adaptive mechanisms capable of integrating modern legal and religious frameworks without sacrificing the core values of reconciliation and collective accountability. Structurally, the indigenous justice system functions as a hybrid model where ancestral wisdom and contemporary governance converge, proving that the sustainability of such systems depends on their capacity to remain relevant and functional within a rapidly changing socio-legal landscape.

To translate these insights into actionable policy, local government units should prioritize strengthening the operational synergy between the Lupon Tagapamayapa and the local Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) framework under the Local Government Code of 1991. This includes creating specific joint mediation procedures and formal referral mechanisms that allow a seamless transition between customary tongtong processes and statutory barangay justice, reinforcing the legal and cultural authority of both systems. Furthermore, educational mandates must be made specific by requiring the Department of Education (DepEd) to develop localized instructional materials that integrate Kibungan's unique indigenous knowledge systems, such as inayan and specific ritual practices, into the curricula. By institutionalizing these localized learning resources, the state can fulfill its indigenous knowledge integration mandates while ensuring that the youth remain structurally connected to their cultural heritage through formal education.

However, these conclusions and their policy implications must be interpreted within the study's methodological limitations. While the participants provided rich, expert-level depth on local legal landscapes, the findings come from a purposive sample of only six key informants. This small sample size means the insights are highly specific to Kibungan and may not generalize to other indigenous communities in the Cordillera region or the broader Philippines. Therefore, while these strategies offer a valuable framework for localized resilience, broader research is necessary to confirm their applicability across diverse indigenous populations.

Contributions of Authors

Conceptual writing, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis

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Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interest.

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