

Exploring the Effects of the Implementation of Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance among the Tagakaulo and Blaan in Malungon, Sarangani Province

Mariel M. Guanzon*, Sulpecia L. Ponce

Department of Sociology, MSU – Iligan Institute of Technology, Iligan City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: mariel.guanzon0601@g.msuiit.edu.ph

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Abstract. This study explored the effects of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance on the Tagakaulo and Blaan in Malungon, Sarangani Province. A mixed method employing quantitative and qualitative approaches, specifically concurrent triangulation design was used to gather relevant data. This study provided the customary practices of the indigenous communities in which the results showed the gender separation and taboos against premarital interaction between men and women. They also accepted polygyny and the separation of married couples. The marital practices of Blaan and Tagakaulo include child and arranged marriages as well as the instances of forced marriages where children married against their own will. Malungon enacted the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance in 2018 to ensure children's education and protection. The results showed that the mentioned practices declined as it is prohibited, especially with the approval of RA 11596 or the law criminalizing child marriage. Even though there are violators in its initial implementation in the far-flung areas, results showed that both communities highly accepted the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage ordinance and the law criminalizing child marriage with the subthemes: education as a priority, protection, and welfare of their children, and negative consequences of early marriage. Furthermore, friendships and relationships are already accepted without requiring them to marry instantly. This study contributed to the understanding of the implementation of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage ordinance followed by approval of the law criminalizing child marriage affected the customary marital practices of the Blaan and Tagakaulo communities.

Keywords: Child marriage; Forced marriage; Arranged marriage; Government ordinance.

1.0 Introduction

The Blaans and Tagakaulos were among the original inhabitants of large parts of Southern Mindanao (Christensen, 1997). Sarangani Province is in the southernmost part of Mindanao where Malungon is one of its upland municipalities (depedsarangani.org). It is also a first-class municipality in the province and is considered an ancestral domain of the Blaan and Tagakaulo indigenous people. According to Guiam et al. (2013), many indigenous communities practiced early and pre-arranged marriage as it is considered one of the most significant rites of passage. Bicchieri et al. (2014) also found that conformity in the community is one of the factors behind child marriage as it was accepted as a part of their custom, tradition, and culture. In Malungon, one of the problems encountered by the municipality was the rising cases of teenage pregnancy. Based on their data from 2015 to 2017, it was 27% which is over and above the 4% threshold by the Department of Health. This makes the municipality the highest percentage in Region 12. Aside from that, there were 11, 12, and 13-year-old mothers recorded. According to the Municipal Social Welfare Development Officer, there is a case of a young girl married to an older

husband who experienced a hemorrhage that also ignited the local officials to protect children as they recognized that early and arranged marriages are a threat to child safety and well-being.

Hence, the Municipal Tribal Chieftain as well as the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative, authored an ordinance prescribing rules and regulations against child and forced marriage as a deterrent to teenage pregnancy in the Municipality of Malungon and appropriating funds thereof” otherwise known as the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance for both IP and non-IP groups. It was unanimously approved by the members of Sangguniang Bayan and approved by the Municipal Mayor in March 2018. It is a response to the result that the practice of child and arranged marriage was one of the contributing cases of teenage pregnancy and health-risk issues for children. As reported by UNFPA (2022), child marriage is considered a precursor to teenage pregnancy that poses health risks to girls and death due to complications from pregnancy and childbirth. According to the ordinance’s author, it safeguards children’s right to education and protection.

With its implementation, representatives from the local government of Malungon were invited to the senate deliberation for the proposed bill that criminalizes child marriage which is now a national law known as RA 11596. Hanna et al., (2014) stated that communities must be consulted at the earliest stage possible and the indigenous people need to be invited to participate in assessing procedures that affect them. This study described the customary practices of Blaan and Tagakaulo. It also determined the effects of the municipal ordinance in terms of its acceptability, penalty, and issues and challenges as it meddled with their customary marital practices. Hence, it addressed two research gaps. First, the spatial gap with the limited research that explored the cultural practices of Blaan and Tagakaulo in Malungon. Second, the empirical gap with the absence of study on the effects of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage ordinance in their cultural practices and their reactions to its implementation.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A mixed method employing quantitative and qualitative approaches, specifically the concurrent triangulation design, was used to gather relevant data. This design gathers and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data to cross-validate the results from different sources (Creswell and Clark, 2018). The researcher used surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and Key Informant Interviews (KII) to gather effective results and interpretations of Blaan and Tagakaulo, specifically their customary practices and the effects of the local ordinance.

2.2 Research Participants

The specific areas were Sitio Kalonbarak for Blaan and Sitio Kityan Daku for Tagakaulo in the Barangay Poblacion under the Municipality of Malungon, Province of Sarangani. The IP village of Blaan at Sitio Kalonbarak is approximately 7.6 kilometers from the municipal hall while the Tagakaulo respondents and participants reside around 3 kilometers away. These communities were selected based on the numerous residents of the mentioned indigenous groups in Barangay Poblacion.

Key Informants at the barangay level were the tribal chieftain, sitio leader, youth representative, women's organization president, and the barangay captain in both communities to know their response and strategy to its implementation. Other key informants from the municipal level to gather valuable inputs to the enactment and implementation of the ordinance include the Municipal Tribal Chieftain/Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR)/President of Blaan Indigenous Political Structure, Former IPMR currently Barangay Affairs Officer, Municipal Social Welfare Development Officer (MSWDO), Local Youth Development Officer (LYDO) and President of Tagakaulo Indigenous Political Structure/Vice Municipal Tribal Chieftain. For the survey, 30 sets of Kaulo parents in Kityan Daku and 30 sets of Blaan parents in Kalonbarak, incorporating 60 Blaan and 60 Tagakaulo respondents. They can share relevant information on their marriage practices, the acceptability of the ordinance, and the challenges encountered. Also, two focused group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each community that were participated by five women who experienced their customary marriage.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher utilized a researcher-made survey questionnaire and interview guide. The research adviser, and statistician colleague who is also a research coordinator reviewed and validated these instruments. It followed ethical guidelines as the researcher received a compliance certificate from the NCIP Region XII. A pilot test was

conducted to clarify the questions. Moreover, the researcher handed the informed consent form to all the research respondents and participants as the purpose of this study informed them.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

During the proposal of this study, the researcher coordinated with the ordinance's author. As he gave his approval, the researcher asked permission to conduct from the Municipal Mayor of Malungon and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) Region XII. The NCIP staff from Sarangani Province accompanied the researcher at a community meeting, and she echoed the rationale and purpose of the study to the tribal council of Barangay Poblacion, Malungon Sarangani Province. They have decided to unanimously approve the conduct of the study in two IP communities. After completing the process required by the NCIP, they issued the Certificate of Compliance.

Regarding the study's conduct, the researcher coordinated with the community leaders and tribal chieftains of both communities to conduct the survey. The researcher gave the survey respondents the informed consent form and explained the significance of the study. The informants received a letter at both barangay and municipal levels for the KII. The FGD was conducted after finishing all the KI. The researcher also conducted the validation facilitated by the NCIP staff to comply with their final requirement after gaining the results.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study followed the Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) on academic research guidelines set by NCIP Region XII. The Municipal Tribal Chieftain and the Municipal Mayor also approved the conduct of this study. All survey respondents, key informants, and FGD participants signed the informed consent form 13 of MSU-IIT. The collected and analyzed data are held confidentially and privately. It also underwent a community validation process with the NCIP staff, ensuring the integrity of the results.

2.6 Data Analysis

For the narrative from the informants and FGD participants, the researcher used thematic analysis. For the survey, the researcher used the following: a) Frequency and Percentage distribution to determine the answers in the checklist questions, and b) Weighted Mean to determine the average score of samples.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The following are the customary practices of Blaan and Tagakaulo communities in two IP communities in Malungon, Sarangani Province.

3.1 Division of Sexes

The Blaan and Tagakaulo indigenous people cited sexual taboos (*lafiudin*-Blaan, *samboaga*-Tagakaulo) for unmarried persons, including the prohibition of being seen together in public places with the opposite sex, even among friends. Informants and FGD participants revealed that breaking these rules may result in the forced arrangement of marriage. The parents are the ones who will find a partner for their child, which reinforces strict gender separation. The responses from both indigenous communities indicated that they share the same notion of the division of sexes because they had no courtship before due to the arrangement of parents for their child's partner. In the study of Fernandez et al. (2021), a Blaan informant also said that couples don't undergo courtship since the parents are the ones who court their partner's parents for marriage. It coincides with the findings of Matas (2015), which state that there is an absence of courtship as experienced by pre-arranged marriage students. Informants and FGD participants said:

Girls and boys are not allowed to bond. -J, El, Ep, R (Blaan)

A girl and a boy are not allowed to be near each other. We have had no courtship before because the parents are the ones who settled the marriage. - D, El (Blaan)

Before, the sight of a girl and a boy together was prohibited. If it happens, the parents will arrange the wedding. - (Blaan, FGD participants)

If a girl is still in the well, boys are not yet allowed to go there. -Fb3 (Blaan)

A boy and a girl were not allowed to be seen together...If seen even once, they'd be forced to marry each other. -N, M, B, S, A (Tagakaulo)

In our time, there is no courtship between young individuals, only the parents will talk to the other parents, so girls and boys were not allowed to be seen talking to know each other. – Ft4, Ft5 (Tagakaulo)
A girl and a boy were not allowed to be seen together. If it happens, both parents will plan the date of their marriage. – (Tagakaulo, FGD participants)

Table 1. Division of Sexes

Description	Blaan	Tagakaulo
Men and women were discouraged from being friends which strengthens strict gender separation.	Restriction of contact between opposite sex.	Restriction of contact between opposite sex, if violated, forced marriage will be arranged by parents.
	Forced marriage ensues through parental arrangement.	Absence of courtship in older generation due to parentally arranged marriage.

3.2 Marital Norms and Practices for Unmarried and Married Members

The research participants conveyed that Blaan and Tagakaulo shared cultural practices and norms related to the sexual behavior of unmarried and married members. Key informants and FGD participants from both indigenous groups mentioned the prohibition of children of the opposite sex from being seen together. Here are some of the narratives from both communities:

Unmarried children of opposite sex are not allowed to be seen together. If you are a married woman, you're prohibited from bonding and talking with another man. – Ep, D, El, J, R, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5 (Blaan)

An unmarried girl is not allowed to be seen with a boy. Also, a married woman and another man were not allowed to be in each other's company. – A, B, N, M, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5 (Tagakaulo)

It is prohibited for a married woman to be seen with another man. If it happens, the bridewealth (sablag) will be returned doubled to the husband. – (Tagakaulo, FGD participant)

If both of you talked privately, it means that you have a relationship. – Ft2 (Tagakaulo)

Polygyny

It is prohibited for married women to form close connections with other men. They were not allowed to add additional husbands to the households. However, it is accepted for married men to add wives (damway – Blaan, kaluwa – Tagakaulo) after gaining the first wife's approval. Hirai (2015) defined polygyny in her study as the practice of a man having more than one wife at the same time. A husband who can give the bridewealth and obtain the first wife's approval can have another wife. There was no wedding ceremony, but it involved giving the bridewealth which would be doubled by the man, especially if the woman was currently married but was taken away to be the other wife. They also lived together harmoniously in one house, helping each other with household responsibilities. It was also practiced among indigenous communities such as Tboli (Hirai, 2015) and Kalagan, who were like the wealthy and members of the higher ranks (Joshua Project). In Porcalla's (2017) report, a man cannot be sued for polygamy because he belongs to the Manobo tribe. Garvan (1927) added that it presupposes the first wife's consent, but this practice was infrequent among the Manobo, except for those with the means to pay for the luxury of having another wife. Ebrahim et al. (2017) also mentioned in their study that Muslim members adopted the practice of polygyny under Shari'ah or Islamic Law. Informants from Blaan said:

Before, husbands are allowed to add wives (damway) but wives are not allowed to add husbands. – J, El, D, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

The husband will also give a bridewealth for the other wives. – El, J, R, D, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

The husband will ask for the approval of the wife first before having another wife. –El, R, D, J, Fb4, Fb5

My grandfather had three wives. Man can have many wives as long as he can provide. The first wife can suggest to her husband to have another wife to share household responsibilities. – D

Wives stayed together in one house. If there are five wives, then there should be five rooms. The first wife is the queen of the household. – El

I am the daughter of my father's second wife (damway). My mother and the original wife were okay with it and they were also helping each other with the household chores. –Fb2

My father took a married woman from her husband (amlad) to be his second wife. It was settled through dialogue (kasfala) with the tribal elders and leaders as well as by giving back the bridewealth that doubled from its original value. He gave five horses and two carabaos. –R

My son took the wife of another man. He doubled the bridewealth (kafligo) and gave the Php100,000 to the previous husband. –Fb5

The Tagakaulo observed the same acceptance of polygyny with the responses below:

Husbands are allowed to add wives (kaluwa). No restrictions on the number of wives but a wife is prohibited from adding husbands. – M

A wife must only have one husband but husbands can have more than one wife. –A, S, B, N, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

In my Uncle's house, his wives stay together in the same house but they have different rooms. – B

My grandfather had 15 wives. – A

My grandfather had 9 wives living in one house but in separate rooms. – N

If the husband wants another wife, he will ask for the first wife's consent and she can also suggest a woman she likes. There are no restrictions on the number of wives as long as the husband can provide for their needs. They will stay together in the same house. Then, a sign like a handkerchief and a cap outside the door of the wife's room indicates where the husband sleeps.

– N

I was married at the age of 14. In our marriage, he was abusive every time he was drunk. I was taken away by another man at the age of 28...Yes, he asked first for the approval of his wife. We stayed together for 20 years at the same house with his first wife, helping each other. – Ft4

Separation of Married Couples

Both groups allowed separation (*skah*-Blaan, *meg ayaw*-Tagakaulo) and the practice of men acquiring the wife of another man (*amlad*-Blaan, *peg ayaw*-Tagakaulo) under specific conditions involving the return of the bridewealth (*kafligo*-Blaan, *sablag*-Tagakaulo) usually twofold from the original value. Informants and FGD participants from Blaan said:

In our tribe, if both parties agree to separate (skah), it's okay as long as the bridewealth is returned. It's not always the doubled value but a little higher compared to the value of the bridewealth that was originally given...it depends. It will be facilitated by tribal elders and leaders. – Ep, D

Separation is accepted in our tribe. The new husband will return the bridewealth (kafligo) if she was taken away from her previous husband (amlad) which is usually twofold to the previous husband. – Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

The original bridewealth will be doubled if the wife committed a sin and must give it back to her husband if they separate. – R, El, J, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

The Tagakaulo FGD participants also supported the statements of the key informants.

Separation (meg ayaw) is accepted and the man will return the bridewealth twofold if he takes the woman from her husband (peg ayaw). – B, A, N

There will be no killing as long as there will be dialogue and negotiation (balaw-balaw). If the husband gave his wife the bridewealth of two horses, the man who stole away his wife would return four horses. It will be given in two-fold. – A

Separation is allowed after the bridewealth (sablag) is returned twofold to the husband especially if the woman was taken away by another man. However, if both agree to the separation and there's no other man involved, it's acceptable if the bridewealth is not returned immediately. – Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

The Blaan and Tagakaulo shared a common notion in dealing with the separation between married couples, which involved the return of the bridewealth by the wife or the wife's family if it was a mutual decision. If the couple separated because another man took away the wife, he would give the twofold bridewealth to her husband. The separation process of both indigenous groups was facilitated and settled by the elders and tribal leaders. San Jose (2021) revealed in his study among the Tagakaulo, Blaan, Manobo, and Tausug that they mostly recognized the authority of their tribal leaders for the settlement of misunderstandings.

Table 2. Prohibited sexual behavior of unmarried and married members

Description	Blaan	Tagakaulo
- Unmarried and married individuals are prohibited from forming bonds with the opposite sex beyond their immediate family. - Polygyny is allowed as husbands are permitted to have multiple wives, whereas a wife's infidelity may lead to penalties, typically involving the giving back of the bridewealth mostly doubled from its original value. - A married couple can choose to separate. Also, a man can take away the wife of another man as long as they reach an agreement regarding the return of the bridewealth facilitated by tribal leaders or elders.	A taboo (<i>lafiudin</i>) for unmarried boys and girls to form bond and friendship. Husbands are allowed to add wives (<i>damway</i>) with no limit on the number of wives as long he can give the bridewealth (<i>kafligo</i>) and with permission of the first wife. The wives stayed together in one house but in separate rooms. They allowed separation (<i>skah</i>). The wife will return the bridewealth (<i>kafligo</i>), usually doubled from the original value. The practice of taking away the wife of another man (<i>amlad</i>) which will be settled through giving of bridewealth (<i>kafligo</i>), doubled from the original value.	Sexual taboos (<i>samboaga</i>) as it is prohibited for the unmarried Tagakaulo to form connections with their opposite sex. Husbands are permitted to have another wives (<i>kaluwa</i>). No restrictions on the number of wives given that the bridewealth is settled and agreed by the first wife. They all lived together in one house but in separate rooms. Separation (<i>meg ayaw</i>) is accepted which will be settled through the giving back of bridewealth (<i>sablag</i>), usually doubled from the original value. The man will return the bridewealth (<i>sablag</i>) twofold if he takes away a woman from her husband (<i>peg ayaw</i>). <i>Makabatog</i> led settlement.
	Fulung led the settlement.	

3.3 Marital Practices

Table 3 presents the customary marital practices of child and arranged marriages as well as the occurrences of forced marriage among children for whom they don't have romantic feelings. Both parents discuss (*kasfala* - Blaan, *balaw-balaw* - Tagakaulo) about wanting their children to marry to be followed by their wedding planning. The bridewealth (*kafligo* - Blaan, *sablag* - Tagakaulo) must be wholly given to the bride's family before their wedding as it is one of the processes that tied the marriage of both indigenous groups.

Table 3. Marital Practices

Description	Blaan	Tagakaulo
Both indigenous communities practiced child and arranged marriage before the enactment of the ordinance. There were also forced marriages as children had a limited choice of spouses.	Customarily, they have no courtship, only arranged marriage by the parents.	No courtship as the parents of the boy will talk to the parents of the girl about wanting a marriage.
	<i>Sloluk aban</i> is the engagement of the children in the womb of the mothers through an exchange of <i>malong</i> .	<i>Liwan sa salolo</i> is the marriage engagement of children in the womb of their mothers.
	Existence of child marriage.	Existence of child marriage.
	There were 14, 15, and 16 years old who were already married.	Parents marry off their children ages 11, 13, and 14 years old.
	Occurrences of forced marriage as children are afraid to break the ties made by their parents through the acceptance of bridewealth (<i>kafligo</i>).	The arranged marriages resulted in children being forced to marry as they had no choice and were afraid of their parents.
	The family cornered the boy as he was seen talking to their daughter (<i>atnafus</i>).	<i>Igliputan</i> happened when the girl's family cornered the boy for marriage as they were seen talking.

Arranged Marriage

Both Blaan and Tagakaulo have practiced arranged marriages for their children, sometimes even when they are still so young. It coincides with Tinio's (1993) and Matas (2015) findings among the Blaan. Baja and Diaz among the Tagakaulo (2023) noted in their research among the Tagakaulo communities that some parents will arrange a marriage primarily on the bridewealth for financial considerations. The bridewealth is essential to Tagakaulo

marriage, for it symbolizes commitment and unity between the couple and their families (Baja and Diaz, 2023). Benito (2020) also highlighted this tradition among the Blaan. Informants revealed that:

There was no courtship before, only arranged marriage by the parents. – R, Ep, D, El (Blaan)

Even if they're still in their mother's womb, parents can already arrange their marriage. When they are born as a girl and boy, they will exchange the baby's malong as a sign that they are engaged (sloluk aban). – D (Blaan)

There was no courtship before. Only the parents of the boy will talk to the parents of the girl about wanting a marriage. – A, N, M (Tagakaulo)

We had no courtship before, only parents' agreement. – B (Tagakaulo)

There are arranged marriages at a young age. Sometimes even before the child is born (liwan sa salolo). – A, N (Tagakaulo)

Child Marriage

Many women from indigenous communities get married when they're 17 or under (Hirai 2015). The study of Guiam et al. (2013) in the Blaan of the municipality of Malungon with 80 respondents revealed that 15 years old was the average marrying age of both sexes. Baja and Diaz (2023) also conducted a study about young Tagakaulo couples, noting the practice of child marriage. Moreover, the participants of their FGD confirmed the prevalence of child marriage. In this study, 27 out of 60 Blaan and 23 out of 60 Tagakaulo respondents were married before 18. Informants from both communities said:

Before, 14 and 16 years old can already be married. – R (Blaan)

I worked at Polomolok, South Cotabato. There, I was in a relationship with my co-worker. A few months later, he accompanied me to my house. My parents scheduled the date of marriage after a week. I was 15 years old at that time. – Fb2 (Blaan)

After reaching an agreement, an 11-year-old can be married. At ages 13 and 14, parents can marry off their children. – B (Tagakaulo)

The boy and his parents went to our house in the presence of my parents. I just followed the instructions of my parents since I never really thought about it. I agreed to our relationship and married him at the age of 14. – Ft4 (Tagakaulo)

Forced Marriage

In this study, some Blaan informants have witnessed arranged marriages that led to children marrying someone without their full consent. There were also situations where the girl's family cornered a boy as they were seen talking. A few Blaan respondents from the study of Guiam et al. (2013) shared that their parents forced them to marry early. These are the narratives of Blaan informants and FGD participants:

A girl is forced to agree even if she does not want to marry because she is afraid of her father. – El

The parents arranged the marriage and forced marriage happened when the child did not want to get married...but was forced by the parents due to prior ties with the other family. – Ep

I was 14 years old when I was married to a boy arranged by my parents. I was forced to marry him because they were already there. My parents told me that I was young when they already received my bridewealth (kafligo) which is a gong and a horse. My sister's marriage was also arranged by my parents and it happened when she was at the age of 15. – Fb3 (FGD, Blaan)

There was also a situation of our neighbor before where the family cornered the boy as he was seen talking to their daughter (atnafus). – Fb4, Fb5 (FGD, Blaan)

Forced marriages also happen in the Tagakaulo communities as children have limited autonomy in selecting their future spouses since their parents are the ones doing it. As stated by the informants:

A boy talked to the girl then the boy was cornered by the girl's family to marry her (igliputan). – N, A

Both parents planned the marriage without the ideas and approval of their children...children are forced to marry because they are also afraid of their parents. – M, A

There were girls in our neighborhood before that they did not want to marry especially with older husbands but they did not have a choice. – Ft2, Ft5 (FGD, Tagakaulo)

Both indigenous communities share similar marital practices, although they differ in the terms that they use. They have practiced giving the bridewealth before marriage, including its return when separation happens, as it plays a significant role in serving as a symbolic and tangible element of marital relationships. Based on the responses of the informants, forced marriage is the result of the practice of child and arranged marriage, as the children have

limited choices in selecting their spouses. They also fear going against their parents' decisions and traditions. Using the Structuration Theory, child and arranged marriage have been accepted as part of the structure in both Blaan and Tagakaulo communities. Hence, they have seen nothing wrong in deciding the partner for their children, including their marriage, despite their age, since it became part of their practices as Blaan and Tagakaulo. Even though, as individuals, they had the agency to resist this practice, there was no support system from local officials and tribal leaders before. As a result, they failed to exert an effort to resist this practice, knowing that it was detrimental to the children. Nowadays, there is a difference in their realizations with the enactment of the ordinance in 2018, in which the penalty was repealed by RA 11596 (law criminalizing child marriage) in 2021.

3.4 Acceptance of the Blaan and Tagakaulo on the Provisions of the Ordinance including the RA 11596

The table below indicates that Blaan has a very high acceptance of the provisions and prohibitions of the ordinance, including the RA 11596 or the law criminalizing child marriage, based on the level of their strong agreement on the law as indicated through the mean score per item response the highest of which is 5.00. They believed that the purpose of the ordinance was for their children's brighter future (mean: 4.97), protecting them from abuse and exploitation (mean: 4.97), which also ensured the welfare of their children (mean: 4.95). Similarly, the Tagakaulo also adheres to the idea that the ordinance is for their children's future (mean: 5.00) as well and the RA 11596 strengthens the ordinance, believing that it aims to protect the children from abuse and exploitation (mean: 4.98). It is for their children's brighter future (mean: 4.98). Both indigenous communities strongly agree with a mean result of 4.90 for Blaan and 4.88 for Tagakaulo on all the provisions and prohibitions of the ordinance and the RA 11596 or the law criminalizing child marriage. There were already numerous laws that aimed to stop the practice of child and arranged marriages. Article 5, Executive Order No. 209, also referred to as the Family Code of 1987, mentions that the minimum marriage age is 18 years old for both men and women (officialgazette.gov.ph). In 2015, the UN Human Rights Council Resolution strengthened the efforts to eliminate the practice of child, early, and forced marriage as it violates human rights (Calimoutuo et al., 2016). Nevertheless, these attempts were not successful in contrast to the enactment of the local ordinance, which had strong support from the communities and tribal leaders as they realized the great significance of education and the negative consequences of early marriage through a series of community consultations and Information Education Campaigns on the purpose of the enactment of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance in 2018 and the implementation of RA 11596 in 2021.

Malungon is the first ever LGU to enact an ordinance prohibiting child marriage...banning child and forced marriage. When our partners such as WeLive Foundation, Commission on Population and Development, and Gabriela knew about the ordinance, they lobbied it to the Senate. We are not the sole basis but we were invited as resource persons during the deliberation of RA 11596 when it was still a senate bill. It is one of the milestones in Malungon because we are able to do it since we are an ancestral domain of Blaan and Tagakaulo. We are able to break the barrier. – Ks
Actually, our ordinance was one of the basis of the RA 11596. From the national level, they went to us and conducted their research. – Ep

Informants from both communities expressed also their acceptance on the RA 11596 with the following statements below:

We were very happy with the approval of the law because we are hoping that our children will not experience difficulties someday. Also, the members of our tribe were aiming for our children to finish their education. – A
The penalty of the ordinance will not instil fear but the penalty of the law (RA 11596) will. – A
The law will make them fear a penalty such as Php40,000, where do you find such money even the tribal chieftain can be imprisoned. It is a tough law. – N
The passing of the law strengthened and supported the ordinance. The ordinance is only implemented in Malungon which is why we are in great joy with the approval of RA 11596 because it covers the whole Philippines. – Ep
I am happier with the law because we need to prioritize children's education. – J
I am happy with the implementation of the law. – R
The law is good because it includes imprisonment which people feared. I am happy because there were children who failed to go to school and got pregnant at a young age because their parents didn't care. Right now, there are protocols that the parents' must attend to their child's concerns so they will not be summoned to the barangay. – S
The law is good. It also reinforced the ordinance. With its implementation, the national law will prevail. – M

The Tagakaulo FGD participants also have a positive outlook on the RA 11596 as well as some Blaan participants but there were two who expressed their sentiments:

I do not want to be fined Php50,000 as imposed by the law and then end up in jail. – Fb3

Parents should not be held responsible for their children's decision to marry early by fining and imprisoning them. If the children were the ones who decided it, they must bear the penalties for their actions. As parents, we tell them about the things that are good for them such as studying but if they do not believe, we can do nothing about it. – Fb5

Table 4. Level of Acceptance of the Blaan and Tagakaulo on the Provisions of the Ordinance No. 2018-108-13 including the RA 11596 (Law Criminalizing Child Marriage)

Statements	Blaan		Tagakaulo	
	Mean	V.I.	Mean	V.I.
1. I consider the implementation of Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance for IP and non IP in the Municipality of Malungon is helpful in preventing the cases of teenage pregnancy.	4.73	Strongly Agree	4.67	Strongly Agree
2. I consider the implementation of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage for IP and non IP in the Municipality of Malungon to reduce the cases of teenage pregnancy.	4.73	Strongly Agree	4.58	Strongly Agree
3. I believe that the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage is enacted for the welfare of our children.	4.95	Strongly Agree	5.00	Strongly Agree
4. The Presence of Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Advisory Council at the Municipal and Barangay Levels will help address our tribe's concern.	4.88	Strongly Agree	4.95	Strongly Agree
5. I support on the creation/ establishment-plan of Child and Youth Development Affairs Office to encourage the active participation of our children in sports, education and various trainings.	4.93	Strongly Agree	4.93	Strongly Agree
6. I support on the creation/ establishment-plan of Counseling Section under the Municipal Health Office to help and assist the child and teenage mothers.	4.96	Strongly Agree	4.87	Strongly Agree
7. I approve the RA 11596 or the law criminalizing child marriage as it will ensure the facilitation and solemnization of child marriage as well as cohabitation of adults with children shall be penalized.	4.93	Strongly Agree	4.80	Strongly Agree
8. The RA 11596 protects the children from abuse and exploitation.	4.97	Strongly Agree	4.98	Strongly Agree
9. The RA 11596 will strengthen the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance	4.92	Strongly Agree	5.00	Strongly Agree
10. The ordinance will ensure our children's brighter future.	4.97	Strongly Agree	4.98	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.90	Strongly Agree	4.88	Strongly Agree

The Influence of Power in the Approval of the Ordinance

The highest leaders from both Blaan and Tagakaulo indigenous groups in Malungon were the ones who pushed the ordinance and endorsed it to the tribal leaders and council of the 31 barangays, representatives of every sector during the multi-sectoral meeting, and to the people of the Municipality as the ordinance concerns both the IP and non – IP. However, the IP communities of Blaan and Tagakaulo were the ones who were highly affected by the presence of the practice of child and arranged marriages, leading to instances of forced marriages. The ordinance's author is Blaan, the Municipal Tribal Chieftain and the current IPMR. Together with the previous IPMR and now barangay affairs officer (Tagakaulo) and the Vice Municipal Tribal Chieftain (Tagakaulo), they were all for the approval and enactment of the ordinance. Moreover, the Municipal Mayor of Malungon, a member of the Blaan indigenous group, approved the ordinance by seeing its importance. The local government also focused on providing quality education, resulting in the implementation of Innovation and Collaboration in Attaining No Limitation (I CAN) in Education program.

With their positions, they were the ones who held great power in influencing the indigenous people. Rahim (1989) defined power as the ability of one party to change or control another party's behavior, attitudes, opinions, objectives, needs, and values. They can draw commitment from the indigenous people to achieve the collective goal of successfully implementing the ordinance. The Fulung of the Blaan are equivalent to the Datus or elders of other tribes and were the most respected and renowned members of the community since they are also recognized as the highest leaders in the community who facilitated in resolving significant conflicts within and among the indigenous communities (Buendia et al., 2006). Makabatog or Wiseman served as the tribal leader for Tagakaulo (Arquiza, 2001). They have functions similar to those of the Fulung of the Blaan. The power and authority they

hold over the indigenous people in Malungon played a significant role in influencing them to accept and comply with the ordinance, highlighting the importance of education instead of marriage and emphasizing that the ordinance is for the children's welfare and benefit.

We are not having a hard time getting the support of the tribal leaders because the Municipal Tribal Chieftain as well as the current IPMR pushes the ordinance...they understand its significance. – Ks

It underwent a consultative meeting where many sectors were informed. Many members knew the ordinance because at every tribal meeting, the tribal chieftains echoed the prohibited act of marrying off children at an early age. – N

During the meeting with the tribal leaders in Malungon about the ordinance, they clarified if it is not against the customary law. My answer is no. When you say customary law, everyone practiced that customary law. It is just a practice since not all indigenous members want to marry early, especially those who have educated children. They have no objections but ask if it harms or damages the culture. I answered them that it is part of 'education that changes their lives' direction'. Many realized 'that to arrange your child for marriage is tantamount to killing them and dragging them into prison' since they have no other opportunities as you imprisoned their future. Unanimously, they go for the approval and support of the ordinance. The Sangguniang Bayan also unanimously approved the ordinance. – Ep

Yes, there is a proposal. The 31 tribal chieftains of Malungon attended where a proposal was endorsed with a reason that our children must have an education and not marry early. We supported and gave clearance for the approval of the ordinance as we are looking to its positive results. – D

We conducted a series of tribal council meetings, barangay assemblies, and other events to inform the public about the purpose of the ordinance. – M

Few reacted to the ordinance when we had our conference in Malungon. I replied that we need to accept this ordinance because our children must not be married early. In child marriage, we are the ones who destroy our children's future. Our culture can understand and adjust as we aim to protect the future of our children. Then, they understood and did not resist. – N

Acceptability and Willingness to Comply with the Ordinance

The Blaan and Tagakaulo survey respondents and research participants accepted and were willing to comply with the ordinance. Results showed they prioritized their children's education, protection, and welfare. There is also a recognition of the negative consequences of early marriage. It also means that the research participants recognized the negative impacts of child marriage, resulting in the need to protect their children and ensure their welfare, specifically through education. Furthermore, informants shared their high appreciation of the benefits of education and professionalism, which led them to recognize the need for an ordinance against child marriage. Key informants from the barangay and municipal level also conveyed their ideas and observations about the acceptance and compliance of the indigenous communities.

Yes, they saw the difference...that it is beneficial for them. If they continue the practice of early marriage, the young couple will sacrifice a lot in establishing their livelihood. They saw the importance of finishing their education before entering into marriage. – C

They accepted it because it was for the protection of their children. They have already seen the advantages of their children going to school. – Kr

Yes, they accepted the ordinance... the trend these days is the competition in terms of completing their education. Yes, they are willing to comply with the ordinance. – B

The penalty is not the main reason that they accepted the ordinance but they saw the negative consequence of marrying their child at an early age...the elders understood the decent purpose of the ordinance. – Ep

I can say that they accepted the ordinance because of the lesser practice of early and arranged marriage. The parents recognized the importance of children finishing their studies for better opportunities. – M

Blaan informants affirmed their statements as they mentioned:

Our Blaan community accepts and abides by the ordinance. – R, D, J

I am very happy with the ordinance. I can see that the children in our community were happy because there was no arranged marriage and they could choose who they wanted. Also, parents today are happier if their children finish their studies. – El

Education is very important. If you have knowledge and education through going to school, it is for your benefit. I only reached elementary. In my family, my child graduated as a nurse and now working in California. If I encourage her to marry, she will not reach her dreams. The tribe also realized the advantages of children not being married early because they hoped for children to finish their education, unlike before when they were thinking of the bridewealth. – D

Furthermore, the Blaan mothers who participated in the FGD highlighted their reasons for accepting the ordinance such as:

We accepted the ordinance. – Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

I accepted the ordinance because it was for the family's benefit. – Fb1, Fb4.

I also accepted the ordinance for our children to finish their education to ensure employment and at 16 years old...they still do not understand the marriage responsibilities. – Fb3

I agree with the ordinance because it is hard to have enough income, children must have an education. – Fb2

The ordinance is for our children's future. – Fb5

The Tagakaulo informants and participants also have positive views on the enactment of the ordinance with the following narratives:

We are happy with the ordinance so that the Tagakaulo children can focus on finishing their education – S, Y

I accepted the ordinance to protect the children and for them to complete their education. – N

We really accepted the ordinance because it is important to end those practices to ensure our children's welfare and future...they are willing to abide because our tribe's goal is for their children to finish their studies. – A

We agreed and approved of the ordinance. – Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

The children will not marry early and they will finish their studies – Ft1, Ft2, Ft3

I accepted the ordinance because life is very difficult today. If they marry early, it will only add to the burden of the family. – Ft4

I accepted the ordinance for our children's welfare and for them to focus on their education. – Ft5

3.5 Level of Acceptance on the Prohibited Acts in the Ordinance No. 2018-108-13

Table 5. Level of Acceptance on the Prohibited Acts in the Ordinance (No. 2018-108-13)

Statements	Blaan		Tagakaulo	
	Mean	V.I.	Mean	V.I.
1. The man or groom at the time of the marriage ceremony who is at least 18 years old.	4.65	Strongly Agree	4.78	Strongly Agree
2. The guardians, parents, and other individuals who have moral authority over of the minor, including any members of groups or associations that support child marriage or fail to take action to stop it	4.80	Strongly Agree	4.87	Strongly Agree
3. Those who perform, participate, and encourage forced marriage or child marriage.	4.85	Strongly Agree	4.83	Strongly Agree
4. Religious community, or tribal leaders who either enabled forced marriages to occur or did nothing to stop them while having personal knowledge.	4.88	Strongly Agree	4.90	Strongly Agree
5. Those who arrange the union of one or two minors and cause them to live together as husband and wife before reaching the age of 18..	4.80	Strongly Agree	4.77	Strongly Agree
6. Any person who violated the ordinance will be fined the amount of P2,500.00.	4.83	Strongly Agree	4.80	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.80	Strongly Agree	4.83	Strongly Agree

The results indicated that the respondents strongly agreed with the prohibited acts of the ordinance (mean 4.80-Blaan and 4.83-Tagakaulo). The FGD and KII revealed that they want their children to complete their education for a better future. FGD participants have said that the Php2,500.00 penalty is also significant for them. On the other hand, informants also noted that:

The penalty is not the main reason that they accepted the ordinance but they saw the negative consequences of marrying their child at an early age...the leaders and elders understood the decent purpose of the ordinance. – Ep

They are not afraid of the penalty because it is a minimal amount but as time goes by after the implementation of the ordinance, they are not doing the child and arranged marriage as they prioritize their children's education. – C

Honestly, if we think about it, the penalty is just a small amount since they can provide a bridewealth with high value. What changes their decision is the realization due to constant information, and education campaigns. – Ks

The Blaan and Tagakaulo this time realized that the ordinance was for their benefit as they also put a high value on the education of their children. – M, B, Ep

If we look at the penalty of Php2,500.00, it is just a small amount since they can even afford Php15,000.00. It's because they prioritized education. Also, if they violate it, their attention will be called, and it is a shame (kamula-mula) for them. – B
The penalty is a small amount, but they must think of their future if they marry early. – Ft4
They are not afraid of the penalty because it is a minimal amount that they can pay but they think that it is for the welfare and benefit of the children. – D
The good practices remained...what changed was the attitude of the tribe as they saw that the ordinance is needed and timely especially since we are a developed municipality, they witnessed how great to have professionals. – M

Hence, the penalty is not the primary factor for accepting the ordinance as both respondents and informants highly recognized that its enactment aimed to protect the welfare of their children. The findings in the studies of Guiam et al. (2013) and Hirai (2015) on other Blaan communities also revealed a common desire among the Blaan to prevent child marriage. The study of Baja & Diaz (2023) among Tagakaulo couples indicated that they were unwilling to continue the practice of child marriage because survival is difficult with early marriage. Responses from the KII and FGD also showed the same, acknowledging the importance of education and the negative consequences of child marriage.

3.6 Issues and Challenges Faced By The Blaan And Tagakaulo

As witnessed by 2 (3.5%) Blaan and 1 (1.8%) Tagakaulo, there was a continuity of arranged marriages below 18 years old. There were also 14 (24.6%) Blaan and 2 (3.6%) Tagakaulo who observed resistance from their community to change their customary marital practices. Even though there are no recorded petitions and complaints from all the 31 barangays in the Municipality of Malungon, it illustrates minimal resistance from both indigenous communities. The study also revealed the issue of cohabitation, which is reflected below, with 38 (66.7%) Blaan and 48 (85.7%) of Tagakaulo respondents affirmed parental consent for cohabitation. Its presence is also shown in Table 7 for Blaan (2.17) and Table 8 for Tagakaulo (1.90), which indicates that it was observed occasionally after the ordinance's implementation. The union involving a minor did not change drastically after the ordinance's implementation. There were only 3 (5.3%) for Blaan and 2 (3.6%) for Tagakaulo, who identified the low enforcement of the prohibited acts of the ordinance. Only 2 (3.6%) Tagakaulo exhibit a slight issue concerning the support of tribal leaders and elders and a language barrier in information dissemination with 1 (1.8%). Out of 60 respondents for each IP group, others found no issues or challenges in its implementation.

Table 6. Issues and Challenges in the implementation of the Ordinance

Category	Blaan	Tagakaulo
Parents' consent on child cohabitation	38 (66.7%)	48 (85.7%)
Resistance to change marital practices	14 (24.6%)	2 (3.6%)
Low enforcement of ordinance prohibited acts	3 (5.3%)	2 (3.6%)
Continuity of arranged marriage below 18 yrs. old	2 (3.5%)	1 (1.8%)
Lack of support of the tribal leaders and elders to the provisions of the ordinance.	0 (0%)	2 (3.6%)
Language barrier in the dissemination of information.	0 (0%)	1 (1.8%)
TOTAL	57	56

Parents' Consent on Cohabitation

There were marginal cases of early cohabitation with parents' approval that could be part of the awareness gap in implementing the ordinance. Informants and FGD participants among the Blaan in Sitio Kalonbarak pointed out:

We were informed late about minors living together. We did not separate them because the girls were already pregnant but we talked to the parents not to repeat the same circumstances. – R, D

We will let the parents decide because the cohabitation already occurred. I told them that the tribal leaders would not accept this. We guided you and told you about the ordinance because there is a consequence for this. They replied that they needed to defend their honor since their children already lived together. They requested the consideration of the tribal leaders that when the minors reach 18 years old, they will get married. – D

We knew a young girl who lived together with her partner. We talked to their parents but we did not separate them since the girl was already pregnant. The parent of a girl also said that she wanted her daughter to finish her education but they decided to live together. – El

Yes, there are existing few cases of cohabitation among minors after the implementation of the ordinance. The tribal chieftain and purok leader talked to them and their parents. – Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

My daughter did not finish her grade 11 in 2019 as she chose to live together with her boyfriend even if we wanted her to finish her studies first. – Fb2

The Tagakaulo informants and participants in Sitio Kityan also faced the same issues on cohabitation, as verified by the following statements:

We face issues related to the cohabitation of minors, as parents often fail to engage leaders during the meetings and discussions (balaw-balaw). We called the attention of both parties and talked to them. – A

We have a situation where a girl was 16 years old. They stayed together though they were not yet married because the girl was already pregnant. They reached a marriage agreement when the girl turned 18 years old. – N

There was a case where a girl was pregnant. They signed an agreement that the boy would marry her when she reached 18 years old. They separately stayed at their parents' house. – B

Instances of early cohabitation exist, but the decisions are no longer made by the parents because it is initiated by the children. – Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

Initial Reaction to the Ordinance

The municipal ordinance is a solid blow to the marriage traditions of the Blaan and Tagakaulo communities. Although the data gathered above indicated the overwhelming acceptance of these communities about the penalty and prohibitions of the ordinance in 2018, repealed by RA 11596 signed into law in 2021, some indigenous people initially expressed their sentiments and minimal resistance to the enactment of the ordinance as it would affect their tradition specifically their customary marital practices. These are the narratives below:

From 2016-2017, the ordinance was almost two years in the making. It was hard to penetrate because it is part of the culture as child marriage is a customary practice of the tribe. Some questioned for interfering with their culture. So, the biggest job of the Technical Working Group (TWG), especially our Mayor is to explain to the tribal leaders the reason why the ordinance is needed and the need to stop certain practices. At first, there is a resistance. But, through the series of communication and information campaigns, they understood that their children's future would be affected if those practices continued. – Ks

At first, I heard that some members were complaining about the ordinance. During our first meeting, some showed negative reactions because it is part of their traditions that were passed through generations. But, through a series of meetings, they understood the reason for its enactment. – C

Out of 100%, only 5% reacted but right after that the ordinance was discussed well, it made them understand its purpose. There's no revolt and petition from the communities. – B

At first, there were some reactions from the members of the tribe but the importance of the ordinance was talked over to them again. Then, they understood that the ordinance was not for the sake of other people but for their families. – M

Violators of the Ordinance in its Initial Implementation

Informants and FGD participants revealed that there have been cases of minimal resistance following the ordinance, especially in the far-flung communities, as they continue the practice of child and arranged marriage, leading to some children being forced to marry early. In Malawi, Africa, there were inconsistencies in a new marriage act that prescribed the age of marriage to be 18 years old, which threatens the enforcement of the law, arguing that legal reform is essential but not enough (Wang, 2016). It showed that reforming family law is one of the most difficult to achieve. However, the collaborative effort of the municipal and local officials and the support of the tribal leaders of the communities played a significant part in ensuring the successful implementation. It also revealed the community residents' active engagement and awareness in reporting cases of children, including timely intervention and addressing reported cases of child marriage through direct communication and attention from the local authority and the tribal leaders.

If a community resident hears that parents are set to marry their child, they will report it to me or the DSWD but there are very few parents who resist due to personal interest...we will call their attention and talk to them. – Ep

There is no problem...if there are cases, they automatically report it in the barangay. The barangay level with the BCPC will intervene. – Kr

We received a call on the conduct of child marriage in Barangay Tamban. The venue was already prepared, and we told the involved families that it was prohibited...the ceremony was postponed since the girl is only 16 years old. – A

A young girl is set to marry and with the help of the SK Chairman and Tribal Leader, it is stopped. The young girl did not want to marry because she wanted to study first. The informant added that there was also a situation in another barangay

where the parents already arranged the marriage of their young daughter, and the Barangay Captain intervened to stop the marriage. Also, the youth and leaders are already empowered by the enactment of the ordinance. – Ks
There was a case in another barangay where a child cried because her parents forced her to marry but it was stopped. We requested the parents for a dialogue... the marriage did not happen. – Ep

With these constant Information Education Campaigns (IEC) and support from the tribal leaders and local officials, both communities for Sitio Kityan Daku and Sitio Kalobarak revealed their acceptance and compliance with the ordinance:

No petition and revolt in our community. – R, J, D (Blaan)

There was no complaint because the children were happy to choose whom they liked and the parents were happier if their children finished their studies. – El (Blaan)

No violent reactions in our community. – Blaan, FGD participants

No resistance to the implementation of the ordinance. – S, Y, N (Tagakaulo)

No negative reactions from our family and neighborhood. – Tagakaulo, FGD participants

The result implied that the Blaan and Tagakaulo understood the reasons behind the ordinance's implementation despite their initial struggles, as it would change their customary marital practices. The Mayor and Municipal Tribal Chieftain quickly addressed the concerns through dialogue and meetings. Using the lens of the Structuration Theory, one factor that there was no apparent resistance to the implementation of the ordinance of both indigenous groups as they chose to adhere to the external structure, which is the ordinance as it is mandated by the government, endorsed by their municipal and supported by their tribal leaders who hold power and authority in their communities. Arquiza (2001) mentioned in her study that an INDISCO staff discovered that some tribal leaders knew that the community members would not question their decisions due to the hierarchical social structure in their community as residents often look up to them in facilitating to solve their problems. Others who were hesitant at first have also realized the benefits it holds for their children through the constant information education campaign by their municipal and local officials, including their tribal leaders.

Although it contradicted their social structure as a child and arranged marriage was part of their traditions, they chose to accept and abide by the external structure mandated by the government. However, aside from the influence of their leaders, some expressed their acceptance of the ordinance, as supported by the replies of some informants and FGD participants as they realized the disadvantage of marrying early without proper education. The Structuration Theory also claims that individuals have the capacity of the agency to reproduce or modify an existing structure. Through the series of meetings and the Information and Education Campaign, indigenous people evaluated and identified that the practice of child and arranged marriages leading to forced marriages can negatively affect their children's well-being as it prevents them from reaching their full potential. Lastly, the responses also showed that the indigenous people have rationalized what is fair and reasonable to future generations. All these realizations and justifications led to collective actions of modification in their existing structure and transformation into a new structure that adapted to the rules and regulations.

The tribe realized that there are practices that should be stopped...self-actualization of the tribe on the negative consequences of early marriage and early pregnancy. Yes, there is a realization and behavioral change among the community members that it is wrong to destroy the future of the children and they should not use the notion of culture as an excuse to hinder children from finishing their education and getting a good life. Most parents especially those in the cultural communities experienced struggles in marrying and bearing a child at an early age and so, they did not want their children to suffer the same. – Ks

3.7 Perceived Changes in Blaan Practices

The results indicated the changes in the customary practices of the Blaan, specifically those related to child and arranged marriages, resulting in forced marriage on the end of the children. These practices were also clearly prohibited by the ordinance in 2018 and the law criminalizing child marriage signed in 2021. The data reveals a shift from being very highly observed practices of wedding ceremonies of a girl or boy below 18 years old (mean: 4.77) and arranged marriages of minors (mean: 4.77) to very low or rarely manifested and observed on any occasions in their community. Highly observed practices such as forced marriage, adolescents are encouraged to

marry early, and adult grooms that marry a girl below 18 years old have also declined. However, cases of early cohabitation before, with the parents' approval, have been observed on some occasions (mean: 3.15) and are still observed on a few occasions (mean: 2.17) in their community today. According to the FGD participants, the children are the ones who decide this because, as parents, they want their children to finish their education.

Yes, there are existing few cases of cohabitation after the implementation of the ordinance, and the tribal chieftain and purok leader talked to them and their parents. –Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

My daughter did not finish her grade 11 in 2019 as she chose to live together with her boyfriend even if we wanted her to finish her studies first. –Fb2

In terms of the discontinuity of child, arranged, and forced marriages, they affirmed that:

The practice of child and arranged marriage has been stopped in Sitio Kalonbarak. No children are forced to marry these days. – R, El, D, J, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5

It is important to note that the practice of bridewealth remains very highly observed by the Blaan community as it is not discouraged by the ordinance. The decline of the practices prohibited by the ordinance suggested that the Blaan community is well-informed about the importance of the ordinance, and local officials and tribal leaders strongly support its implementation.

Table 7. Perceived Changes in Blaan Practices

Practices before and after the implementation of the ordinance		Before		After	
		Mean	Description	Mean	Description
1.	A wedding ceremony for a girl or a boy below 18 years old	4.77	Very High	1.23	Very Low
2.	The man/groom who is 18 years of age and above at the time of the celebration of the marriage with a girl below 18 years old.	4.21	High	1.32	Very Low
3.	Parents/guardians marry off their daughters below 18 years old.	4.23	High	1.42	Very Low
4.	The family received the bridewealth	4.98	Very High	4.78	Very High
5.	The cohabitation of minors with the approval of the parents.	3.15	Moderate	2.17	Low
6.	Cohabitation of minors without the knowledge of their family	1.75	Low	1.15	Very Low
7.	A girl below 18 years old chooses to marry early.	3.65	High	1.18	Very Low
8.	Forced marriage happened in the community.	3.95	High	1.03	Very Low
9.	Arranged marriages of minors happened in the community.	4.77	Very High	1.08	Very Low
10.	Adolescents are encouraged to marry early.	4.00	High	1.02	Very Low
Grand Mean		3.95	High	1.64	Low

3.8 Perceived Changes in Tagakaulo Practices

Table 8. Perceived Changes in Tagakaulo

Practices before and after the implementation of the ordinance		Before		After	
		Mean	Description	Mean	Description
1.	A wedding ceremony for a girl or boy below 18 years old	4.50	Very High	1.15	Very Low
2.	The man/groom who is 18 years of age and above at the time of the celebration of the marriage with a girl below 18 years old.	4.20	High	1.28	Very Low
3.	Parents/guardians marry off their daughters below 18 years old.	4.22	High	1.17	Very Low
4.	The family received the bridewealth.	4.93	Very High	4.55	Very High
5.	The cohabitation of minors with the approval of the parents.	3.95	High	1.90	Low
6.	Cohabitation of minors without the knowledge of their family	2.03	Low	1.22	Very Low
7.	A girl below 18 years old chooses to marry early.	4.03	High	1.32	Very Low
8.	Forced marriage happened in the community.	3.93	High	1.01	Very Low
9.	Arranged marriages of minors happened in the community.	4.82	Very High	1.02	Very Low
10.	Adolescents are encouraged to marry early.	4.27	High	1.05	Very Low
Grand Mean		4.09	High	1.57	Low

According to the data, the Tagakaulo community effectively adapted to the changes brought about by the ordinance. The very highly observed practices of weddings involving a girl or a boy below 18 years old (4.50) and arranged marriages involving minors (4.82) have significantly declined, which shows their acceptance and compliance. The data also revealed the community's highly observed practices before involving children,

arranged, and forced marriages declined from highly observed to no longer observed except for instances of early cohabitation, which continue in a limited number of cases. It showed minimal opposition to the ordinance's prohibitions. Like the Blaan community, the Tagakaulo continues the tradition of giving bridewealth since the ordinance does not prohibit this practice. The decline in the practices that violate the ordinance results for both communities suggests indigenous communities' shared acceptance and adherence. In the findings of Pelayo (2015), child marriage rates globally have declined, with one in four women marrying at a minor age compared to one in three in the early 1980s. The result added the percentage of girls marrying before the age of 15 dropped from 12% to 8%, which suggests a continued decrease in child marriages.

The tribal leaders also agreed that early marriage was not right for their children that's why they decided to stop the practice. – Kr, Ks, C

In Sitio Kityan Daku, there are no longer occurrences of child and arranged marriage...children are highly discouraged from marrying early. – S, A, Y, N, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

Transition of the Marital Practices

The responses of the KI and FGD also revealed a significant cultural shift in the practices of the Blaan and Tagakaulo communities, showing an acceptance of various forms of companionship towards more inclusive attitudes with some regulations and changes in their marital practices as they approve the purpose of the ordinance. There was an evolving attitude towards relationships and marriages since the indigenous communities had undergone significant changes as they had already accepted relationships and friendships. Children were now allowed to have friends of the opposite sex, and parents no longer dictated their child's choice of partner. Hence, children from these communities have more freedom in choosing their spouses. Also, technological advancement permitted children to have friends and relationships online, leading to difficulty controlling them. As mentioned by the informants at the municipal level:

Children are allowed to have friends but they are discouraged from marrying early. Dating is accepted. Nowadays, it is also difficult to control our children because of the use of cell phones. – Ep

It's really different these days. Children are allowed to bond with friends and some are in a relationship. The role of the parents is to remind their children to focus on their studies. We have numerous integrated schools to ensure that children even in far-flung areas can go to school. Education is the best! – B

Friendship and being in a relationship are already accepted by the indigenous communities. – M, Ks, Kr

The informants and participants of both communities affirmed the acceptance of friendships and being in a relationship:

It is now acceptable to have friends with the opposite sex and to be in relationships. – J, El, D, R, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5 (Blaan)

Our children are allowed to have friends...girls and boys can be seen together. – S, Y (Tagakaulo)

Now, parents do not choose their children's partner...the children are the ones who will choose their partner. – S, Ft5 (Tagakaulo)

Parents are educated that a girl can be friends with a boy. – A, Y, N, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5 (Tagakaulo)

Before, the people in the communities were mostly uneducated, thus they directly followed the tradition. – A (Tagakaulo)

If a girl gets pregnant, we do not automatically recommend cohabitation at present. The girl will stay at her mother's house. After the child was born, we hoped that she would continue her studies as we did not want her to be illiterate. – A (Tagakaulo)

Being in a relationship is allowed unlike before. – N, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5 (Tagakaulo)

With the enactment of the ordinance, there were also regulations and changes in the marriage practices of both IP communities with the following responses:

Our Mayor has not allowed the Barangay Tribal Chieftains to officiate tribal marriages, reserving this role solely for the Municipal Tribal Chieftain. – Kr

The tribal chieftain will not officiate a wedding ceremony involving a minor. Relationships are allowed but parents gave reminders to focus on education. – C

In a case involving a pregnant minor, a dialogue was initiated with the family. We reached an agreement that their child would marry only upon reaching 18 years old. They decided not to live together at present. – B

The good practices remained...what changed was the attitude of the tribe as they saw that the ordinance is needed and timely especially since we are a developed municipality, they witnessed how great to have professionals. – M
We do not change who we are but we stop the practices that affect the welfare of our children. – A, R, D
This is not an issue for the loss of their identity as members of the indigenous communities retained practices that do not deprive their children's welfare. – Ep
Our culture can understand and adjust as we aim to protect the future of our children. – N

The report of Christensen (1997) from the interviews with the Blaan and Tagakaulo in Malungon brought about the importance of education in distancing younger generations from certain indigenous practices that can harm them, such as arranged marriages at an early age. The informant added in that report that despite being educated, they retained their cultural identity as they learned the cultures that should not be practiced and those that should be preserved and promoted. It shows the significance of education in helping them shape their lives and in choosing which part of their cultures to protect and promote. Also, the positive influence of Kasalan ng Bayan for its cost-effectiveness is one of the initiatives of the local government of Malungon.

The Municipality offers free weddings through Kasalan ng Bayan to legally aged couples. It is officiated by our Mayor during the Lingap sa Barangay. – Kr, Ep, B, M
We have free weddings every Lingap sa Barangay. As to the conditions for the live-in partners, the cohabitation must start during their legal age and stay together for at least five years. – Ks
Kasalan ng Bayan is really helpful because there are no expenses. – J, D, R, Fb1, Fb2, Fb3, Fb4, Fb5
Kasalan ng Bayan during Lingap ng Barangay for couples of legal age is freely offered. – A, S, Ft1, Ft2, Ft3, Ft4, Ft5

4.0 Conclusion

This study explored the effects of the Anti-Child and Forced Marriage Ordinance in Malungon in which the municipal and barangay officials, as well as the tribal council, gained in-depth data on the implementation of the ordinance and the response of the indigenous community, including the enactment of RA 11596. It gave the indigenous groups an avenue to convey their insights and to realize their commitment to abide by the law. Both indigenous communities adhered to the custom of child and arranged marriages. Forced marriages also happened before, as children have a limited say in choosing their spouses.

Additionally, part of their customary practices was the giving of bride wealth, strict taboos on interactions between the sexes, polygyny, and separation. Even though they have culture, beliefs, and practices that have been part of their social structure for a long time, they were willing to accept the changes in their marital practices due to these subthemes: education as a priority, protection, and welfare of their children, and negative consequences of early marriage. The data from the survey respondents also showed very high acceptance of the provision of the ordinance and RA 11596 as they put high regard for education and professionalism, resulting in a shift by discouraging their children from marrying early. The survey data revealed that practices prohibited by the ordinance were rarely to no longer observed.

Furthermore, there is a cultural shift among the Blaan and Tagakaulo, marked by greater acceptance of relationships and friendships and increased freedom for children in choosing partners. There is also a regulation in marriages in which the couple must be of legal age and the positive view of Kasalan ng Bayan for its cost-effectiveness. Remarkably, both indigenous communities adjusted their social structure as they were willing to abide by and adapt to the changes imposed by the ordinance in 2018 and the approval of RA 11596 in 2021. It is recommended that the implementation of RA 11596 studies be explored in the far-flung areas and other members of the IP communities outside Malungon. Also, studies focus on the Tagakaulo communities, their cultural identity, the experiences of teenage mothers, and the impact of early marriages since there are limited studies of Tagakaulo compared to Blaan.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The first author, Mariel Guanzon, processed the NCIP, gathered data, encoded and analyzed data, and wrote the results and discussion of the study. The second author, Sulpecia Ponce, served as the research adviser who guided the formatting, interpreting, editing, and finalizing the results of the study.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

There are no conflicts of interest about the publication of this paper as long as it is used for academic purposes only.

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