

# ADVANCING INDIGENOUS WOMEN-LED CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT IN CALAUIT ISLAND: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE

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# INTRODUCTION

- In 2020, the **Tagbanwa IP community of Calauit Island, Palawan**, established a WMA within their **ancestral waters** to manage their fishing grounds for *cachipay*, a native windowpane oyster (*Placuna* sp.)



Source: Mongabay Article (Chan, 2022)

- This study explored the establishment, implementation, and challenges of the WMA in Calauit Island, in an attempt to **identify ways forward to truly advance the indigenous women's contribution** to coastal resource management and blue economy.

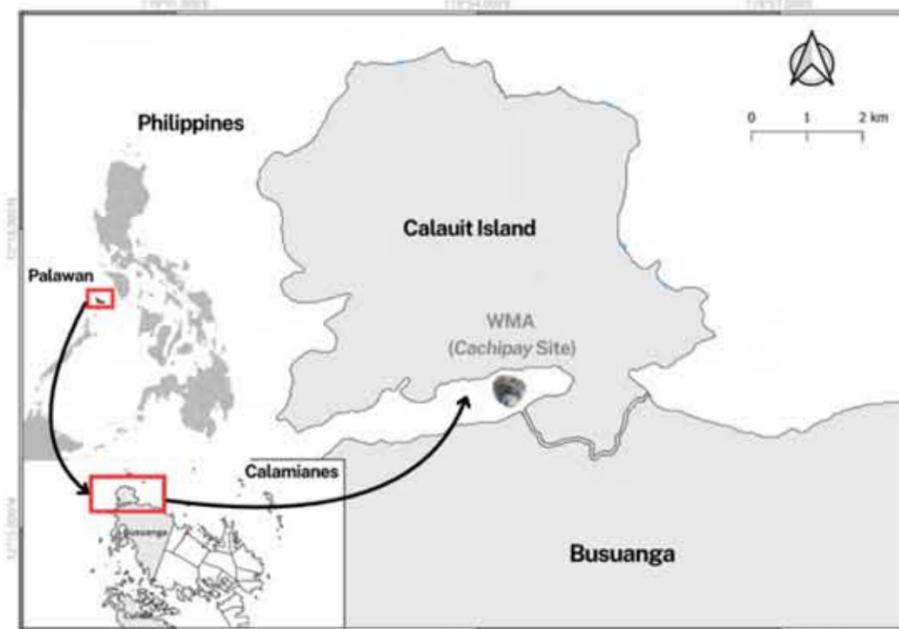


Figure 1. Map of Study Site in Calauit Island, Busuanga, Palawan, Philippines

# METHODOLOGY



FGD with WMA association and IPO members (n=4)

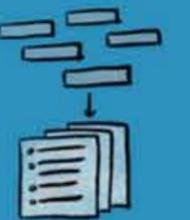


KII with IP organization leaders (n=2)

**Data Processing**  
(Translation, Data Cleaning)



**Thematic Analysis**  
(10 Interrelated Themes)



## PHASE 1: STRONG START (2019-2020)

WMA Association Timeline

2019

- Initial Coordination
- Preparatory Activities



2020

- WMA formal establishment
- Creation of DiWATA women's association

2021

- 37 members
- 6 specialized committees

2022

- Membership decline
- No income generated

2023

- End of WMA Monitoring
- Reduction to 6 members

2024

- Rejected Php 2.7 M grant
- Merger into KATOCA Association

PRESENT

### 1 Establishment & Leadership SUCCESS

- NGO-Assisted
- Milestone (58.4 ha WMA)
- Formal Structure

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Strong external and internal kickstart
- Accepted **volunteer nature** of women's engagement for **at least 1 year**

### 2 Community & Gender Dynamics ACHIEVEMENT

- Breaking Patriarchy
- Male Support
- Geographic Empowerment Disparity



#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Lack of **gender-sensitive operational design**
- Economic opportunities correlates with women empowerment**

### 4 Capacity & Training SUFFICIENT

- Comprehensive (NGO/Gov't) Training
- Initial Equipment Provided
- Capital Gap

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Training breadth is good, but practice and **continuity fails due to funding**
- Identified knowledge gaps on citizens' arrest and *cachipay* biology

## PHASE 2: CHALLENGES EMERGED AND MAGNIFIED (2021-2022)

### 3 Policy & Legal Context CRITICAL GAP

- Non-recognition of CADT
- No Counterpart Municipal Ordinance
- Enforcement Void
- Ancestral Plan Gap

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Customary & NCIP recognition insufficient vs **outsiders seeking municipal laws**
- Lobbying efforts stalled; LGU-administrative follow-through lacking

### 6 Environmental Monitoring CEASED

- Declining Frequency
- Collected Data
- Provide tools
- WMA Site Limitation

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Monitoring capacity existed but was not sustained due to a **lack of funds**
- Active monitoring inadvertently **attracted poachers**

### 8 Coordination & Partnerships MIXED

- Multiple Active Partners
- Partner Dependency:
- Municipal Gap
- Limited IECs

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Partners provided valuable inputs
- Project dependency and slow release of funds/grants **weakened trust and enthusiasm of WMA members**

## PHASE 3: CRITICAL CHALLENGES (2022-2024)

### 5 Economic Outcomes FAILED

- Zero Income
- Failed Projects
- Self-funding
- Unrealized Markets



#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Reliance on a **single natural resource with uncertain knowledge** (i.e., *cachipay*) made the **income fragile and inconsistent**
- Lack of early, guaranteed buyers undermined product initiatives

### 7 Sustainability & Funding Outcomes HALTED

- Depleted Funds
- Volunteerism Limit
- Missed Opportunities

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Financial sustainability is the central vulnerability**
- To improve management, IP community leaders merged and **reorganized all women's groups** in Calauit Island to KATOCA

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## PHASE 4: WAYS FORWARD

### 9 Lessons & Replicability LEARNED

- Success Factor: Immediately identify or link IGPs to WMA management**, same as with other model protected areas in Palawan; **match early livelihood pilots to realistic market analyses** to avoid early collapse
- Member Selection:** "Screen officers for commitment and skills, since appointed members might be forced."

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- Practical, income-first interventions are more replicable** than purely conservation-first approaches
- Governance (e.g., municipal backing of CADT and WMA) and personality conflicts are critical failure nodes**

### 10 Strategic Directions IDENTIFIED

- Initial Compensation:** "Ensure association funds and salaries, even below minimum wage"
- Resource Diversification:** *Cachipay*, seaweed, lobsters, marine fishes
- Explore government and IPO support:** Secure LGU and NTCQ support (e.g., MOA, ordinance, signages), as well as available funds for WMA management
- Science-based Management:** Study the distribution and reproductive biology of *cachipay* in the WMA by tapping academe partners and resume monitoring efforts
- Tourism Integration:** Package WMA IGPs with dugong watching, educational campaigns, and cultural showcase to ensure consistent funds and formal external recognition

#### Patterns & Tensions:

- The **community prefers short-term income and visible benefits to sustain conservation activities.**
- Strategic directions require **parallel action on legal recognition and market linkages**

# CONCLUSION

- By highlighting both the achievements and obstacles that the Calauit Island WMA faces, this study identified **actionable steps to revitalize** the Indigenous women's association.
- For the success of community-based and women-led conservation, the findings emphasized the importance of:
  - **consistent funds and income**
  - **inter-agency coordination**
  - **early market integration**
- Despite persistent challenges, the WMA remains as a viable **platform for women's empowerment** and a means of **advancing their leadership in coastal resource management**.

