

The Lifeworld of Leaders in Remote Villages against Victimization in Mindanao, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines, particularly in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities. Anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory, Community Resilience Framework, and Conflict Theory, the study sought to understand how local leaders navigate socio-political adversities, sustain peacebuilding efforts, and envision the safety and development of their communities. Specifically, the study examined the experiences of village leaders in relation to government support and community collaboration, as well as their aspirations for enduring peace and sustainable development.

A qualitative research design utilizing transcendental phenomenology was employed to capture the essence of the participants lived experiences. Ten (10) informants from remote villages in the municipalities of Sergio Osmeña, Zamboanga del Norte, and Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur, were purposively selected. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework.

Findings revealed two major themes regarding the experiences of the informants: (1) strong and effective government program support and (2) community support and collaboration. The findings demonstrated that accessible government assistance, responsive governance, and active community participation significantly contributed to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and social cohesion in remote villages. Likewise, two major themes emerged regarding the aspirations of the informants: (1) commitment to enduring peace and (2) pursuit of sustainable development. The informants expressed a strong desire to prevent the recurrence of armed conflict while promoting development initiatives that improve safety, stability, and quality of life.

The study concludes that sustainable peace and security in remote villages require transformative local leadership, resilient communities, collaborative governance, and inclusive development interventions. The findings contribute to the growing literature on grassroots leadership, peacebuilding, and community resilience in conflict-affected communities in Mindanao, Philippines.

Keywords: leaders, phenomenology, community participation, sustainable development, victimization

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict, political instability, and community insecurity remain persistent global concerns that continue to undermine social cohesion, governance, and sustainable development, particularly in geographically isolated and marginalized communities. Across various regions of the world, local leaders are often confronted with the challenge of maintaining peace and order amid socio-political tensions, poverty, weak institutional support, and recurring violence. Studies have emphasized that grassroots leadership plays a critical role in conflict transformation and peacebuilding because local leaders serve as frontline actors who directly mediate disputes, mobilize community participation, and facilitate collaborative governance mechanisms (Bass & Riggio, 2006;

Galtung, 1996). In conflict-affected communities, leadership extends beyond administrative functions and becomes a vital instrument for sustaining resilience, strengthening social trust, and promoting long-term peace and security.

In many developing nations, remote villages are particularly vulnerable to insurgency, armed conflict, and socio-economic marginalization due to limited access to government services and weak institutional presence. Community leaders in these areas frequently assume multifaceted responsibilities that include conflict mediation, crisis management, and coordination with security agencies and humanitarian institutions. Transformational leadership theory posits that effective leaders inspire collective action, strengthen community engagement, and motivate individuals toward shared societal goals (Burns, 1978). Similarly, community resilience frameworks highlight the importance of collective participation, social connectedness, and adaptive local governance in responding to crises and insecurity (Norris et al., 2008). These perspectives suggest that local leadership is fundamental in fostering stability and facilitating peacebuilding initiatives within vulnerable communities.

In the Philippine context, Mindanao has long been characterized by complex historical, political, and socio-cultural conflicts that have significantly affected the safety and security of communities. The island has experienced decades of armed struggles involving insurgent movements, clan feuds, extremist groups, and territorial disputes, resulting in displacement, economic disruption, and social fragmentation (Gutierrez & Borras, 2004). Historical grievances related to land dispossession, political exclusion, and socio-economic inequality have further intensified tensions in many parts of Mindanao, particularly among marginalized sectors and indigenous populations. Despite numerous peace negotiations and government interventions, many remote communities continue to experience instability and vulnerability brought about by recurring armed encounters and weak development structures.

Within this context, local village leaders in remote areas of Mindanao carry the burden of ensuring the welfare, safety, and security of their constituents despite limited resources and challenging socio-political conditions. Barangay leaders often act as mediators between government authorities, security sectors, and community members while simultaneously addressing the psychosocial and developmental needs of residents affected by conflict. Existing literature has primarily focused on macro-level peace processes, armed conflict dynamics, and institutional interventions in Mindanao, while limited scholarly attention has been given to the lived experiences, aspirations, and peacebuilding roles of grassroots leaders in geographically isolated villages. This gap is significant because local leaders possess contextual knowledge and community-based strategies that are essential in understanding sustainable peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected areas.

Furthermore, the role of community collaboration and government-supported peace initiatives has increasingly become essential in addressing local security challenges in Mindanao. Community-based peacebuilding efforts, participatory governance, and inter-agency cooperation have been recognized as important mechanisms for conflict prevention and social stabilization (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Civil society organizations and local peace networks in Mindanao have also underscored the importance of inclusive community participation and grassroots engagement in achieving durable peace settlements. Nevertheless, despite these interventions, remote villages continue to confront persistent issues associated with poverty, insecurity, and underdevelopment, thereby emphasizing the need to examine how local leaders navigate these realities and envision safer and more progressive communities.

Hence, this study explores the lived experiences of leaders in remote villages and their aspirations for the safety and security of their communities. Specifically, the study focuses on two major themes: (1) the life of the informants as leaders in remote villages, particularly in terms of strong and effective government program support for progressive conflict resolution and community support and collaboration; and (2) the aspirations of the informants for the safety and security of their villages, particularly their commitment to enduring peace and pursuit of sustainable development. By examining these experiences and aspirations, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on grassroots leadership, peacebuilding, and community resilience in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, Philippines.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study is anchored primarily on **Transformational Leadership Theory** developed by Burns (1978) and further expanded by Bass (1990) and Bass and Riggio (2006). The theory explains how leaders inspire, motivate, and influence individuals toward collective goals, social transformation, and community empowerment. Transformational leaders foster trust, cooperation, and shared vision by encouraging participation, strengthening morale, and addressing the needs of the people they serve. In conflict-affected and geographically isolated communities, transformational leadership becomes essential because leaders are often required to maintain peace, mediate conflicts, and promote resilience despite limited institutional resources and persistent socio-political challenges.

Burns (1978) emphasized that transformational leadership transcends traditional authority by focusing on moral purpose, collective welfare, and social change. Bass and Riggio (2006) further explained that transformational leaders demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions are highly relevant to leaders in remote villages who continuously navigate complex community issues such as insecurity, poverty, armed conflict, and underdevelopment. Through transformational leadership, village leaders become catalysts for community collaboration, progressive conflict resolution, and sustainable peacebuilding initiatives.

Complementing transformational leadership theory is **Conflict Theory**, primarily associated with the works of Karl Marx and later expanded in sociological and peace studies literature by scholars such as Coser (1956) and Galtung (1996). Conflict theory posits that social conflict emerges from inequalities in power, resources, political influence, and socio-economic opportunities. In many marginalized and conflict-prone communities, structural inequalities and historical injustices contribute to recurring tensions, violence, and instability. In the context of Mindanao, armed conflicts and insurgencies have often been associated with land disputes, political exclusion, poverty, and weak state presence (Gutierrez & Borrás, 2004). Conflict theory provides a useful lens for understanding the socio-political realities confronting leaders in remote villages and how these leaders respond to tensions and insecurity within their communities.

Galtung's (1996) concept of positive peace further strengthens this framework by emphasizing that peace is not merely the absence of violence but also the presence of social justice, equitable development, and harmonious social relationships. This perspective aligns with the aspirations of village leaders for enduring peace, safety, and sustainable development in their communities. Through conflict-sensitive leadership and collaborative governance, local leaders attempt to reduce structural violence and promote peaceful coexistence despite difficult circumstances.

The study is likewise supported by the **Community Resilience Framework**, particularly the works of Norris et al. (2008) and Aldrich and Meyer (2015), which emphasize the capacity of communities to adapt, recover, and sustain functionality amid crises, disasters, and social disruptions. Community resilience highlights the importance of social capital, collective efficacy, community participation, and institutional collaboration in overcoming adversities. In remote villages affected by conflict and insecurity, resilience is often manifested through community cooperation, mutual trust, participatory governance, and grassroots peacebuilding efforts.

Norris et al. (2008) argued that resilient communities possess adaptive capacities that enable them to respond effectively to challenges and maintain social stability. Similarly, Aldrich and Meyer (2015) emphasized that social networks and community collaboration significantly contribute to recovery, conflict management, and long-term development. These perspectives are highly relevant to the present study because the informants highlighted the significance of community support, collaboration, and government assistance in sustaining peace and security in their villages.

The integration of Transformational Leadership Theory, Conflict Theory, and Community Resilience Framework provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding the lived experiences of leaders in remote villages. Transformational leadership explains how leaders inspire and mobilize communities toward peace and development; conflict theory contextualizes the structural and socio-political challenges affecting

remote communities; while community resilience explains how collective action, cooperation, and adaptive capacities contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable development. Together, these theories offer an integrated framework for analyzing how local leaders in remote villages of the Zamboanga Peninsula navigate adversities, strengthen community relationships, and aspire toward enduring peace and sustainable progress.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines, particularly in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Examine the experiences of leaders in remote villages against victimization;
2. Determine the aspirations of the informants for the safety and security of their villages;
3. Analyze how the lived experiences of the informants reflect the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, Community Resilience Framework, and Conflict Theory;
4. Explore how local leadership, community collaboration, and government support contribute to peacebuilding, resilience, and sustainable development in remote and conflict-affected villages; and
5. Draw practical implications from the findings that may strengthen grassroots leadership, community resilience, and peacebuilding initiatives in geographically isolated and conflict-prone communities in Mindanao, Philippines.

Delimitation of the Study

This study was delimited to exploring the positive experiences and future aspirations of barangay leaders in remote and conflict-affected communities during periods of insurgency in their respective barangays. The study intentionally concentrated on these two dimensions—positive experiences and aspirations for the future—to provide a strengths-based perspective of leadership in conflict-affected areas. While insurgency often highlights violence, displacement, fear, and socio-economic disruption, this research sought to illuminate how local leaders were still able to derive meaningful experiences, foster community solidarity, and sustain aspirations for peace, stability, and progress within geographically isolated communities.

Moreover, the study was limited to the narratives of selected Barangay Captains from remote municipalities in the Zamboanga Peninsula. As such, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of other stakeholders, such as ordinary residents, security personnel, women leaders, or youth sectors in conflict-affected areas. The results were likewise context-specific and should therefore be interpreted within the socio-cultural and political realities of the participating communities. Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences and enduring aspirations of grassroots leaders confronting insurgency-related challenges.

RELATED LITERATURES AND STUDIES

Related Literature

Leadership in conflict-affected and geographically isolated communities has become an increasingly significant area of scholarly inquiry, particularly in developing countries where local leaders serve as frontline actors in maintaining peace, social order, and community resilience. Existing literature emphasizes that grassroots leadership plays a critical role in addressing community conflicts, mobilizing local participation, and fostering sustainable development in marginalized areas (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In remote villages where institutional

support is often limited, local leaders become central figures in coordinating peacebuilding efforts, strengthening social cohesion, and facilitating collaboration among stakeholders.

Transformational leadership theory explains that effective leaders inspire collective action, motivate communities toward common goals, and cultivate trust and cooperation among constituents (Burns, 1978). Bass and Riggio (2006) further noted that transformational leaders possess the capacity to influence social transformation through participatory leadership, empathy, and shared vision. In conflict-prone communities, transformational leadership becomes particularly important because leaders are expected to address social tensions, mediate disputes, and sustain hope among community members despite adversity and insecurity. Studies have shown that leadership grounded in collaboration and community engagement significantly contributes to peaceful conflict resolution and community stability (Northouse, 2019).

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of community participation and collaborative governance in promoting peace and security in vulnerable communities. According to Putnam (2000), strong social capital and collective participation strengthen trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement, thereby enhancing community resilience during periods of instability. Similarly, Aldrich and Meyer (2015) argued that communities with strong social networks and collaborative relationships are more capable of recovering from crises and sustaining social order. These perspectives are relevant to remote villages where local leaders rely heavily on community cooperation and mutual support in addressing peace and order concerns.

In the context of conflict and peacebuilding, Galtung (1996) introduced the concept of positive peace, emphasizing that peace extends beyond the mere absence of violence and includes social justice, equitable development, and harmonious social relationships. This perspective highlights the role of local leaders in fostering inclusive governance, promoting dialogue, and addressing structural inequalities that contribute to social unrest. Conflict theory likewise explains that social conflicts often emerge from unequal access to power, economic opportunities, and political representation (Coser, 1956). In marginalized communities, these inequalities may intensify insecurity, insurgency, and social fragmentation, thereby placing significant responsibilities on local leaders to sustain peace and social cohesion.

Community resilience literature further underscores the importance of adaptive leadership and collective efficacy in conflict-affected communities. Norris et al. (2008) defined community resilience as the process through which communities utilize available resources and social capacities to adapt, recover, and sustain functionality amid crises and adversities. Resilient communities are characterized by social connectedness, institutional trust, and active citizen participation. In geographically isolated villages, resilience is often reflected through community-driven peacebuilding initiatives, collaboration with authorities, and local efforts toward sustainable development.

In the Philippine setting, particularly in Mindanao, armed conflict and socio-political instability have historically shaped the experiences of local communities and leaders. The Mindanao conflict has been linked to historical injustices, land dispossession, poverty, and political exclusion among marginalized sectors (Gutierrez & Borrás, 2004). Despite government peace agreements and interventions, several remote communities continue to experience insecurity and underdevelopment. Consequently, barangay leaders and village officials often assume multifaceted roles involving conflict mediation, peacekeeping, and community mobilization. Existing literature suggests that local leadership and community participation are essential components in sustaining peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-prone areas of Mindanao (Lara & Schoofs, 2013).

Moreover, studies on rural governance indicate that sustainable peace and development are closely interconnected. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022), communities experiencing persistent poverty, weak governance, and limited access to social services are more vulnerable to conflict and instability. Thus, local leaders in remote villages are not only expected to maintain peace and security but also to advocate for sustainable development initiatives that improve the quality of life of their constituents. Development programs focusing on livelihood, education, infrastructure, and social inclusion have been identified as important mechanisms in reducing the roots of conflict and strengthening community resilience.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that leadership, community collaboration, peacebuilding, and resilience are interconnected dimensions in addressing the realities of remote and conflict-affected communities. However, despite the growing body of literature on conflict and peacebuilding in Mindanao, limited studies have specifically examined the lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages. Hence, the present study contributes to the literature by providing an in-depth understanding of how grassroots leaders navigate adversities, sustain peacebuilding efforts, and envision safer and more progressive communities in the Zamboanga Peninsula.

Related Studies

Several local and international studies have examined leadership experiences, peacebuilding initiatives, community resilience, and conflict management in marginalized and conflict-affected communities. These studies provide important insights into the realities encountered by local leaders and communities operating within unstable socio-political environments.

Internationally, a study conducted by Aldrich (2012) found that social capital and community networks significantly contribute to recovery and resilience in disaster- and conflict-affected communities. Communities with stronger interpersonal relationships and collaborative structures were more capable of sustaining social order and adapting to crises. Similarly, Norris et al. (2008) emphasized that resilient communities are characterized by collective efficacy, institutional trust, and active citizen participation. These findings support the idea that community support and collaboration are essential elements in sustaining peace and security in remote villages.

In another study, Lederach (1997) highlighted the significance of grassroots peacebuilding and local leadership in conflict transformation. The study emphasized that sustainable peace is best achieved through inclusive community participation, dialogue, and long-term relationship building rather than purely military or political interventions. Local leaders were identified as critical actors in facilitating reconciliation, mediating disputes, and strengthening social cohesion within conflict-prone communities.

A study by Bar-Tal (2007) further revealed that prolonged exposure to armed conflict affects not only the socio-economic conditions of communities but also their collective perceptions, trust, and psychological well-being. The study emphasized the need for community-based leadership and peace initiatives to address fear, trauma, and social fragmentation in conflict-affected areas. This finding is relevant to the experiences of leaders in remote villages who continuously navigate security threats and psychosocial challenges among community members.

In the Philippine context, several studies have examined conflict dynamics and peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao. Lara and Schoofs (2013) explored the relationship between insurgency, local conflicts, and community governance in Mindanao. Their study found that unresolved local disputes, poverty, and weak governance structures contribute significantly to recurring violence and instability in remote communities. The authors emphasized the importance of strengthening local governance and participatory leadership to prevent conflict escalation and promote sustainable peace.

Similarly, Gutierrez and Borrás (2004) examined the socio-political roots of the Moro conflict and argued that structural inequalities, landlessness, and political marginalization contribute to prolonged unrest in Mindanao. Their study highlighted the importance of inclusive governance, equitable development, and community engagement in addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

A local study conducted by Santos and Santos (2010) on peace zones in Mindanao revealed that grassroots peacebuilding initiatives led by local leaders, religious organizations, and civil society groups significantly contributed to reducing armed encounters and promoting peaceful coexistence in conflict-prone areas. The study further noted that community participation and inter-agency collaboration strengthened local resilience and trust among residents.

Furthermore, Abubakar (2019) examined the role of barangay leaders in maintaining peace and order in conflict-affected communities in Western Mindanao. The findings revealed that barangay leaders often serve as mediators between government authorities, armed groups, and local residents. The study emphasized that effective local leadership, community trust, and collaboration with security sectors are crucial in sustaining peace and protecting vulnerable communities.

Despite the growing literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Mindanao, existing studies have largely focused on macro-level political conflicts, insurgency dynamics, and institutional interventions. Limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and aspirations of leaders in geographically isolated villages. Moreover, few studies have explored how local leaders sustain peacebuilding efforts while simultaneously pursuing sustainable development for their communities.

Hence, the present study differs from previous research by focusing specifically on the lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages in the Zamboanga Peninsula. Through a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study provides a deeper understanding of how grassroots leaders navigate socio-political adversities, strengthen community collaboration, and envision enduring peace and sustainable development in conflict-affected communities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of leaders in remote villages in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. Specifically, the study sought to understand how these leaders navigate the challenges associated with conflict, social instability, geographical isolation, and limited institutional resources, as well as how they sustain peacebuilding initiatives and envision the future safety and development of their communities.

Qualitative research is appropriate for examining complex social realities and human experiences because it emphasizes meanings, interpretations, and subjective understandings rather than numerical measurement or statistical generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through qualitative inquiry, researchers are able to gain in-depth insights into participants' perspectives, beliefs, emotions, and lived realities within their natural settings. In this study, qualitative research provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted experiences of leaders in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities.

The study specifically adopted transcendental phenomenology, originally developed by Husserl (1970) and later advanced by Moustakas (1994), which focuses on describing the essence of human experiences as perceived by individuals themselves. This approach emphasizes epoché or bracketing, wherein the researcher consciously suspends prior assumptions, judgments, and personal biases to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Through phenomenological reduction, the researcher identifies the essential structures and meanings embedded in the participants' narratives.

This methodological orientation was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to capture the authentic experiences, reflections, and aspirations of leaders in remote villages confronting socio-political and security-related challenges.

Furthermore, phenomenological inquiry relies heavily on participants' narratives gathered through in-depth engagement and open-ended conversations. According to Eddles-Hirsch (2015), phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of their lived experiences within their socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, the transcendental phenomenological approach provided a rich and nuanced understanding of how village leaders sustain community resilience, conflict resolution, and collaborative governance amid adversity in remote areas of the Zamboanga Peninsula.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in the Zamboanga Peninsula (Region IX), particularly in the municipalities of Sergio Osmeña in Zamboanga del Norte and Dumingag in Zamboanga del Sur. These municipalities were purposively selected because of their geographical isolation, socio-economic challenges, and historical exposure to security-related concerns and insurgency-related activities.

Zamboanga del Norte is composed of 25 municipalities and two cities subdivided into 691 barangays distributed across three congressional districts. The municipality of Sergio Osmeña was chosen because several of its remote barangays experience challenges associated with limited infrastructure, poverty, and peace and order concerns. Meanwhile, Zamboanga del Sur consists of 26 municipalities and one component city subdivided into 681 barangays. The municipality of Dumingag was selected due to its remote location and historical association with insurgency-related activities documented in local reports. These municipalities contain geographically isolated and disadvantaged barangays where local leaders encounter complex governance and peacebuilding responsibilities.

The selected research locales provided an appropriate context for exploring the lived experiences of leaders operating within remote and conflict-affected communities. The informants from these municipalities possessed firsthand experiences and contextual knowledge necessary to address the objectives of the study.

Research Informants

The study involved ten (10) informants who served as Barangay Captains in remote and conflict-affected barangays within selected municipalities in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who possessed substantial leadership experience, direct involvement in community governance, and firsthand engagement in peacebuilding and conflict management initiatives. This sampling approach is appropriate in qualitative inquiry because it enables the selection of information-rich participants capable of providing in-depth insights relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

To ensure transparency and rigor in participant selection, specific inclusion criteria were established. Participants were required to: (1) currently serve or have previously served as Barangay Captains in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities; (2) possess at least five (5) years of leadership experience in local governance; and (3) demonstrate direct and positive experiences in managing insurgency-related situations, including community mediation, peacebuilding efforts, coordination with government security forces, and the implementation of conflict-response strategies. These criteria ensured that the informants possessed the experiential knowledge necessary to articulate the realities of leadership in conflict-affected settings.

The demographic and contextual profiles of the participants further strengthened the credibility of the study. Their leadership experiences included responding to armed encounters, facilitating community evacuations, maintaining peace and order, coordinating humanitarian responses, and fostering collaboration among local government units, law enforcement agencies, and residents. Such contextual backgrounds provided rich narratives that illuminated the complex challenges and adaptive leadership strategies employed in conflict-affected communities.

To protect confidentiality and ensure ethical compliance, pseudonyms or coded identifiers were assigned to all participants. Personal identifiers and exact barangay locations were withheld to safeguard the security and privacy of the informants, particularly given the sensitive nature of insurgency-related experiences discussed during the study.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument utilized in this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to facilitate both individual interviews and focus group discussions. The interview guide was grounded in the principles of transcendental phenomenology and consisted of open-ended questions intended to elicit detailed descriptions of participants lived experiences, leadership practices, coping mechanisms, and aspirations for the safety and security of their communities.

Consistent with the recommendations of Kvale (1996), the interview questions focused on participants' feelings, experiences, beliefs, and reflections related to leadership in remote villages. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while ensuring alignment with the objectives of the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The instrument was validated by the research adviser and members of the review panel to ensure content validity, clarity, and alignment with the objectives of the study.

The interview guide consisted of three major sections: (1) lived experiences of leaders in remote villages, (2) strategies employed in addressing encountered challenges, and (3) aspirations for the safety, security, and development of their villages. With the participants' permission, all interviews and discussions were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of responses. Field notes were likewise utilized to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues during the data collection process.

Research Procedures

Following the approval of the research proposal, the researcher secured ethical clearance and validation of the interview guide from the ethics review committee and academic advisers. Formal letters requesting permission to conduct the study were then forwarded to the Municipal Mayors of Sergio Osmeña and Dumingag. Coordination with local government units facilitated the identification and recruitment of qualified informants.

Prior to data collection, the researcher conducted preliminary orientations with the participants to explain the purpose of the study, interview procedures, ethical considerations, and participants' rights. The informants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all information obtained would remain confidential and anonymous. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of interviews and discussions.

A combination of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions was employed to gather rich and detailed narratives from the informants. Interviews and discussions were conducted in safe, neutral, and comfortable environments to encourage openness and trust. Audio recordings and field notes were utilized during the sessions to ensure comprehensive documentation of the participants' responses. All recorded data were transcribed verbatim immediately after each session to preserve the authenticity and accuracy of the narratives.

Data Collection

Data collection involved the conduct of individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions among the selected informants. According to Patton (2015), in-depth interviews are valuable in obtaining rich descriptions of participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections, while focus group discussions facilitate interaction and collective meaning-making among participants.

The researcher ensured that interviews were conducted in locations convenient and comfortable for the participants to encourage openness and honesty. With consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes documenting non-verbal behaviors and contextual observations. The transcribed data were translated and verified to maintain accuracy and authenticity throughout the analysis process.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was deemed appropriate because it systematically identifies, organizes, and interprets recurring patterns and themes embedded within qualitative data. The analysis began with data familiarization, wherein the researcher repeatedly read and reviewed the interview transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' narratives. Significant statements and meaningful units were then extracted and coded systematically. Similar codes were grouped into clusters that represented common ideas, experiences, and meanings. These clusters were subsequently refined into major themes and sub-themes that addressed the objectives and research questions of the study.

Through this analytic process, the researcher identified the essential structures of the informants' experiences as leaders in remote villages, particularly their struggles, coping mechanisms, collaborative peacebuilding practices, and aspirations for enduring peace and sustainable community development.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to established ethical principles in qualitative research, particularly beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy, to ensure the protection, dignity, and well-being of all participants (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

The principle of beneficence was observed by ensuring that the study contributed positively to understanding and amplifying the experiences of leaders in remote villages, potentially informing future peacebuilding and leadership development initiatives. Non-maleficence was upheld by minimizing potential risks and ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and emotional safety throughout the research process. Sensitive topics were approached with empathy, cultural sensitivity, and respect.

The principle of justice was observed by ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and voluntary participation during participant selection and data collection. Meanwhile, autonomy was maintained by respecting participants' rights to voluntary participation, withdrawal, and informed decision-making. All participants were provided with informed consent forms written in clear and understandable language.

Trustworthiness of the Research

To establish the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement, participant validation, triangulation of data sources, and repeated review of interview transcripts. Transferability was ensured by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and socio-cultural environment, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

Dependability was maintained through the establishment of an audit trail documenting the research procedures, coding processes, and analytical decisions. Peer debriefing and consultation with academic mentors further strengthened the consistency of interpretations. Confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling and continuous cross-checking of interpretations against raw data to minimize researcher bias and maintain objectivity.

Bracketing and Reflexivity

Bracketing and reflexivity were integral components of the transcendental phenomenological process employed in this study. The researcher consciously practiced epoché by setting aside personal assumptions, beliefs, and preconceived notions regarding leadership and conflict-affected communities (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed the participants' experiences to emerge authentically and without undue influence from the researcher's perspectives. Reflexivity was likewise maintained throughout the research process through reflective journaling, peer consultation, and continuous self-examination regarding the researcher's positionality and interactions with participants. According to Finlay (2002), reflexivity strengthens transparency and enhances the credibility of qualitative inquiry by encouraging researchers to critically examine their influence on the research process and interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Experiences of the Informants as Leaders in Remote Villages

The lived experiences of the informants as leaders in remote villages revealed both positive and transformative dimensions of leadership in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities. Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, two major themes emerged under the experiences of the informants: (1)

Strong and Effective Government Programs Support and (2) Community Support and Collaboration. These themes highlight the importance of institutional assistance, participatory governance, and community cohesion in sustaining peace and resilience within remote villages (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Norris et al., 2008).

Strong and Effective Government Programs Support

The first emergent theme emphasized the positive experiences of the informants regarding the support they received from government institutions. The participants described how accessible government assistance, development programs, and responsive governance contributed significantly to maintaining peace, security, and development within their communities. Informants highlighted that government interventions strengthened their capacity as leaders to address local concerns and mitigate threats associated with conflict and insecurity.

One participant expressed appreciation for the strong support extended by local and provincial governments:

Ahm, kalooy sa Ginoo, dasig ang suporta sa lungsod ug sa probinsya para sa kalambuan sa among lugar” (IDI1:SS1). “

(“Ahm, by God’s grace, the support from the town and the province was strong for the development of our area.”)

Similarly, another informant emphasized the accessibility and responsiveness of government services:

“Hmm... maayo man kaayu mosuporta ang lungsod sa mga request namo para sa mga kabarangay” (IDI2:SS16).

(“Hmm... The town has been very supportive of our requests for the barangay.”)

These narratives indicate that effective government support plays a critical role in strengthening local governance and promoting community stability in remote villages. The findings suggest that the visible presence of government institutions fosters trust, security, and confidence among local leaders and residents, particularly in areas vulnerable to armed conflict and socio-political instability.

The findings support the assumptions of Human Security Theory, which emphasizes that security should focus not only on state protection but also on safeguarding individuals and communities from social, economic, and political insecurities (Haq, 1995). The availability of government assistance, livelihood opportunities, and peacebuilding programs contributes to reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing community well-being. Similarly, Gasper (2020) argued that human security frameworks prioritize human dignity, social protection, and inclusive governance as essential foundations of peace and development.

The findings further align with Durkheim’s Anomie Theory, which posits that social instability and weakened institutional support contribute to social disorganization and normlessness (Durkheim, 1897). In contrast, the participants’ experiences demonstrated that strong institutional support and responsive governance foster social cohesion, collective trust, and community resilience. Through effective government programs and sustained public service delivery, local leaders were empowered to address community concerns and strengthen peacebuilding initiatives.

Political alliances also emerged as an important factor influencing access to development support and public resources. One informant stated:

“Kuan, Maam, maayu rajud ning kaalyado nato sa politika ang namo nuon sa lungsod” (IDI5:SS56).

(“Well, ma’am... It’s really good that we’re allied politically with the municipal leaders.”)

This finding implies that political relationships may facilitate faster access to assistance and development programs in remote communities. While such alliances may strengthen coordination and responsiveness, they also reflect the complex realities of local governance in marginalized communities where political networks often influence resource allocation and institutional accessibility.

Overall, the findings reveal that strong and effective government support serves as a crucial stabilizing mechanism for leaders in remote villages. Government presence, development interventions, and institutional responsiveness contribute significantly to sustaining peace, improving governance, and promoting resilience amid persistent socio-political and security challenges (Ezemenaka, 2021; Maksum, 2021).

Community Support and Collaboration

The second emergent theme focused on the positive experiences of the informants regarding community support and collaboration. Participants emphasized that community cooperation, trust, and collective participation were essential in maintaining peace and implementing laws and local programs effectively. The informants described their constituents as cooperative, respectful, and supportive of local governance initiatives.

One participant stated:

“Maayu raman ang ilang kooperasyon sa akong pagdumala, labi najud sa pag implementar sa mga balaod” (IDI3:SS30).

(“They were cooperative in my administration, especially in implementing the laws.”)

Another informant similarly shared:

“Ang mga tawo namo maam, mocooperate ra sila. Mosanong ra sila kong naa me ipatuman nga balaod” (IDI4:SS45).

(“The people here, ma’am, cooperate. They comply whenever we implement laws.”)

These findings indicate that community cooperation strengthens local governance and facilitates peaceful conflict management in remote villages. The active participation of community members reinforces collective responsibility and strengthens social cohesion, thereby contributing to effective peacebuilding efforts.

The findings support Human Security Theory, which emphasizes that community participation and empowerment are essential in addressing local risks and insecurities (Jankowitz, 2018). Communities that actively collaborate with local leaders and institutions are more capable of preventing violence, addressing grievances, and sustaining social order. McCandless (2021) further emphasized that collaborative governance and inclusive participation reduce tensions and promote mutual trust among stakeholders.

The findings also align with Conflict Transformation Theory proposed by Lederach (1995, 1997), which emphasizes long-term social transformation, reconciliation, and relationship-building rather than merely resolving immediate disputes. The willingness of residents to cooperate with barangay leaders demonstrates the importance of trust, dialogue, and collective engagement in fostering peaceful and harmonious communities. Community collaboration serves as a mechanism for transforming social relationships and preventing the escalation of conflicts within vulnerable communities.

Moreover, the findings support Resilience Theory, which highlights the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt and recover from adversities through social support systems and collective coping mechanisms (Norris et al., 2008). The presence of strong community collaboration and social trust enhances the resilience of remote villages by strengthening their ability to respond to insecurity and socio-political challenges. Communities with strong social cohesion are more capable of sustaining peace, maintaining order, and promoting long-term development despite recurring adversities (Tomio, 2014).

A participant further emphasized the trust placed in government programs and community initiatives:

“Dayon ang mga proyekto og programa sa gobyerno, naabot ra man dinhi sa among dapit bisan pag layo kaau me” (FGD1:SS81).

(“Furthermore, the government's projects and programs have reached our community even though we are far away.”)

This narrative highlights that inclusive governance and sustained government-community collaboration foster public trust and strengthen the legitimacy of local institutions. Such collaboration enhances not only governance effectiveness but also the overall resilience and stability of remote communities (Thorpe & Gaventa, 2020).

Aspirations of the Informants for the Safety and Security of their Villages

The aspirations of the informants centered on achieving long-term peace, safety, and sustainable development for their communities. Two major themes emerged from the narratives: (1) **Commitment to Enduring Peace** and (2) **Pursuit of Sustainable Development**. These aspirations reflect the participants’ collective desire to protect their communities from future conflicts and create stable, progressive, and resilient villages (Masten, 2014).

Commitment to Enduring Peace

The first theme reflected the informants’ strong aspiration for lasting peace and stability in their communities. Participants expressed hopes that violence, insurgency, and armed conflict would no longer return to their villages. Many of the narratives reflected trauma from past experiences and a deep longing for security and social harmony.

One informant stated:

“Unta dili na mabalik ang mga NPA diri sa amoa” (IDI1:SS14).

(“I hope the NPA does not return here.”)

Another participant expressed a similar aspiration:

“Ang akua ra jud maam; Ahm...dili na jud unta mabalik to na kagubot” (FGD3:SS96).

(“I just hope that the chaos will never return.”)

These narratives illustrate the emotional and psychological impact of armed conflict on leaders and residents in remote villages. The findings suggest that the participants’ aspirations for peace are deeply rooted in their experiences of fear, insecurity, and social disruption brought about by recurring violence.

The findings are consistent with Resilience Theory, which explains that communities affected by conflict develop adaptive capacities and coping mechanisms to survive and recover from adversities (Masten, 2014). Resilient communities cultivate social cohesion, trust, and collective action to sustain stability despite persistent threats and uncertainties. The participants’ aspirations for enduring peace demonstrate their commitment to preserving harmony and preventing the recurrence of violence within their communities.

Furthermore, peacebuilding literature emphasizes that sustainable peace requires long-term social transformation, inclusive governance, and reconciliation processes (Lederach, 1997). Peacebuilding initiatives that strengthen psychosocial healing, social cohesion, and institutional trust contribute significantly to sustaining peace in vulnerable communities (Osofsky et al., 2018). Likewise, Ungar et al. (2023) emphasized that resilient communities are better able to negotiate and sustain peace despite social and political adversities.

Pursuit of Sustainable Development

The second theme reflected the participants’ aspirations for sustainable development and improved quality of life within their communities. Informants emphasized the importance of development programs, poverty alleviation, livelihood opportunities, and government support in ensuring long-term peace and security.

One participant explained:

“Daghang programa para sa kalambuan og sulbad sa kalisod” (FGD4:SS105).

(“There should be many programs for development and solutions to poverty.”)

The participants associated development with safety, peace of mind, and social stability. The findings suggest that poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment are perceived as underlying factors contributing to insecurity and vulnerability in remote villages.

The findings align with Resilience Theory and sustainable development frameworks, which emphasize that communities become more resilient when social, economic, and institutional systems are strengthened (Reyers et al., 2018). Sustainable development promotes long-term social stability by addressing structural vulnerabilities such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources and services.

Similarly, Adger et al. (2021) emphasized that socioeconomic resilience strengthens communities’ capacity to withstand crises and adapt to changing conditions. Development initiatives focusing on education, livelihood, infrastructure, and inclusive governance contribute significantly to community empowerment and peacebuilding. Berkes (2017) further noted that resilient institutions and collaborative governance systems are essential in promoting sustainable development and effective crisis response.

The findings also underscore the importance of institutional trust and government presence in sustaining security and development. One informant shared:

“Magpabilin unta ang campo sa mga military para among huna-huna, malinawon” (IDI1:SS15).

(“I hope the military camp stays so we can feel secure and maintain peace.”)

This narrative reflects the participants’ perception that government and security institutions remain essential in maintaining peace and protecting vulnerable communities from future threats. The continued presence of military and government support symbolizes stability, security, and assurance for residents in remote and conflict-prone villages.

Overall, the aspirations of the informants reveal that enduring peace and sustainable development are deeply interconnected. The participants envisioned communities characterized by safety, social harmony, economic progress, and responsive governance. Their aspirations underscore the importance of collaborative peacebuilding, inclusive development, and resilient local leadership in promoting long-term stability in remote villages of the Zamboanga Peninsula (Folke, 2020; Li et al., 2018).

Integrated Discussion of the Themes with Theoretical Anchors

The findings revealed that the experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages are deeply shaped by the interaction of leadership, community resilience, and conflict conditions. The themes—strong and effective government program support, community support and collaboration, commitment to enduring peace, and pursuit of sustainable development—demonstrate how local leaders exercise adaptive and transformative roles in sustaining peace and security in conflict-affected villages.

Strong and Effective Government Programs Support

The informants’ positive experiences with government support reflect the relevance of **Transformational**

Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the leader’s capacity to inspire collective action, mobilize resources, and pursue shared community goals (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the narratives, government programs strengthened the leaders’ ability to respond to local needs, promote development, and reduce insecurity. This suggests that remote village leaders do not act alone; rather, their leadership becomes more effective when supported by responsive government institutions.

This theme also aligns with the **Community Resilience Framework**, particularly the view of Norris et al. (2008) that resilience is strengthened through adaptive capacities such as social support, institutional linkages, and access to resources. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) further emphasized that social capital and institutional connections help communities withstand and recover from adversity. The informants' accounts of receiving assistance from municipal and provincial governments indicate that external support enhances local resilience and enables communities to cope with the challenges of isolation and conflict.

From the perspective of **Conflict Theory**, the need for strong government programs reflects the structural inequalities experienced by remote and conflict-affected communities. Marxist conflict theory explains that social conflict is often rooted in unequal access to power, resources, and opportunities, while Coser (1956) emphasized that conflict may expose tensions within social structures. Galtung's (1996) concept of structural violence further explains how poverty, marginalization, and weak service delivery can reproduce insecurity. Thus, government programs become essential not only as development interventions but also as mechanisms for reducing structural conditions that sustain conflict.

Community Support and Collaboration

The theme of community support and collaboration reflects the collective dimension of leadership in remote villages. The informants emphasized that community members cooperated in the implementation of laws and local initiatives, which strengthened governance and peacebuilding efforts. This finding is strongly connected to **Transformational Leadership Theory**, as transformational leaders build trust, encourage participation, and motivate people toward common goals (Burns, 1978; Bass & Riggio, 2006). The cooperation of residents suggests that local leaders were able to establish legitimacy, moral influence, and shared commitment within their communities.

The finding also supports the **Community Resilience Framework**, which highlights that resilient communities depend on social connectedness, collective efficacy, communication, and shared problem-solving (Norris et al., 2008). Aldrich and Meyer (2015) argued that social capital is one of the strongest foundations of community recovery and stability. In this study, cooperation among residents served as a protective factor that helped leaders maintain peace, enforce laws, and promote order despite security threats.

Through **Conflict Theory**, community collaboration may be understood as a response to conflict-producing conditions such as fear, instability, and marginalization. Coser (1956) argued that conflict can strengthen internal group cohesion when communities face shared threats. Similarly, Galtung's (1996) peace framework suggests that sustainable peace requires more than the absence of violence; it requires cooperative relationships and social justice. Therefore, community collaboration in this study represents a grassroots mechanism for transforming conflict conditions into collective peacebuilding action.

Commitment to Enduring Peace

The informants' aspiration for enduring peace demonstrates their strong desire to prevent the recurrence of violence, insurgency, and fear in their communities. This theme reflects **Transformational Leadership Theory** because leaders are not merely concerned with immediate order but with inspiring a long-term vision of peace, safety, and collective well-being. Burns (1978) emphasized that transformational leadership is morally oriented and directed toward meaningful social change. In this context, the leaders' commitment to peace reveals their role as moral agents who seek to protect their people and sustain community harmony.

The theme is likewise supported by the **Community Resilience Framework**. Norris et al. (2008) explained that resilience involves the capacity of communities to adapt and recover from trauma, disruption, and adversity. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) further argued that resilient communities are strengthened by trust, networks, and cooperative action. The informants' longing for lasting peace indicates that past conflict shaped their collective memory, but it also motivated them to preserve stability and prevent future violence.

From the lens of **Conflict Theory**, the aspiration for enduring peace reflects the community's awareness of the destructive consequences of unresolved structural and social conflict. Marxist conflict theory points to inequality

and marginalization as sources of social tension, while Galtung (1996) distinguished negative peace from positive peace. The informants' aspiration goes beyond the absence of armed groups; it reflects a desire for positive peace characterized by security, justice, development, and social stability.

Pursuit of Sustainable Development

The pursuit of sustainable development emerged as an important aspiration because informants associated community progress with safety and peace of mind. This finding may be interpreted through **Transformational Leadership Theory**, as leaders envisioned development not only as infrastructure or economic improvement but as a pathway toward collective security and empowerment. Bass (1990) and Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasized that transformational leaders create shared vision, stimulate change, and encourage people to work toward higher collective purposes.

This theme is also consistent with the **Community Resilience Framework**, which views resilience as the ability of communities to sustain functioning and adapt amid crises (Norris et al., 2008). Sustainable development strengthens resilience by reducing vulnerability, expanding livelihood opportunities, improving access to services, and reinforcing institutional support. Aldrich and Meyer (2015) similarly emphasized that development and resilience are enhanced when communities possess strong social networks and reliable institutional linkages.

Using **Conflict Theory**, sustainable development can be seen as a response to the root causes of conflict. Marxist theory explains that unequal access to resources and opportunities produces social tension, while Galtung (1996) argued that structural violence occurs when social systems prevent people from meeting basic needs. Thus, the informants' desire for development reflects their understanding that peace cannot be sustained unless poverty, exclusion, and underdevelopment are addressed. In this sense, sustainable development becomes both a peacebuilding strategy and a protective mechanism against future conflict.

Synthesis

Overall, the integration of the three theoretical perspectives provides a stronger analytical explanation of the findings. **Transformational Leadership Theory** explains how remote village leaders inspire cooperation, sustain hope, and mobilize their communities toward peace and development. **Community Resilience Framework** explains how government support, social capital, and community collaboration strengthen the capacity of remote villages to withstand and recover from conflict-related challenges. **Conflict Theory** explains the structural roots of insecurity, particularly poverty, marginalization, weak access to services, and unequal distribution of resources.

Taken together, the findings suggest that leadership in remote villages is not merely administrative but transformative, relational, and conflict-sensitive. The informants' experiences and aspirations reveal that enduring peace in remote communities requires responsive governance, empowered local leadership, strong community collaboration, and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines, particularly in conflict-affected and geographically isolated communities. Through a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study revealed that local leaders play a vital role in sustaining peace, maintaining security, and promoting community resilience despite the socio-political, economic, and security-related challenges confronting their villages. The findings demonstrated that leadership in remote communities extends beyond administrative responsibilities and involves adaptive, transformative, and peacebuilding functions deeply rooted in community engagement and survival.

The study identified two major dimensions of the informants' experiences: positive experiences associated with strong government support and community collaboration, and aspirations centered on enduring peace and sustainable development. The findings showed that effective government interventions, accessible public services, and institutional support strengthened the leaders' ability to govern and respond to the needs of their

communities. Likewise, community cooperation, trust, and participatory governance emerged as essential elements in sustaining peace and implementing local initiatives. These experiences indicate that collaborative relationships between government institutions, local leaders, and community members significantly contribute to strengthening resilience and social stability in remote villages.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the aspirations of the informants were strongly anchored on achieving long-term peace, safety, and socio-economic progress. The leaders expressed a deep desire to prevent the recurrence of armed conflict and insecurity while promoting development opportunities that could improve the quality of life of their constituents. The findings suggest that peace and development are deeply interconnected, as poverty, marginalization, and limited access to resources were perceived as underlying contributors to instability and vulnerability in remote communities.

The integration of Transformational Leadership Theory, Community Resilience Framework, and Conflict Theory provided a comprehensive understanding of the findings. Transformational Leadership Theory explained how local leaders inspire cooperation, strengthen trust, and mobilize collective action toward peace and development. The Community Resilience Framework highlighted the significance of social capital, institutional support, and community collaboration in enabling communities to withstand adversities and recover from conflict-related challenges. Meanwhile, Conflict Theory illuminated the structural inequalities and socio-economic conditions that continue to shape insecurity and marginalization in remote villages.

Overall, the study concludes that sustainable peace and security in remote villages cannot be achieved through government intervention alone. Rather, they require transformative local leadership, resilient communities, collaborative governance, and inclusive development initiatives that address both the immediate and structural causes of conflict. The lived experiences and aspirations of the informants underscore the importance of empowering grassroots leaders and strengthening community-based peacebuilding efforts in geographically isolated and conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. Ultimately, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on local leadership, community resilience, and peacebuilding by providing deeper insights into how remote village leaders navigate adversity and envision safer, more progressive, and sustainable communities.

Implications of the Study to Practice

The findings of this study provide significant practical implications for local governance, peacebuilding initiatives, public administration, and community development programs in geographically isolated and conflict-affected communities. The lived experiences and aspirations of leaders in remote villages underscore the importance of strengthening grassroots leadership, collaborative governance, and community resilience in sustaining peace and security.

First, the study highlights the need for government agencies and local government units (LGUs) to strengthen institutional support mechanisms for leaders in remote villages. The findings revealed that responsive government programs, accessible public services, and active government presence contribute significantly to maintaining peace, trust, and stability within vulnerable communities. Thus, policymakers and government institutions may utilize the findings of this study in designing more inclusive, responsive, and community-centered development and peacebuilding programs tailored to the realities of geographically isolated villages. Strengthening infrastructure, livelihood programs, education, healthcare services, and security interventions may help reduce the structural conditions that contribute to conflict and instability.

Second, the study emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership practices among local leaders. The findings suggest that leaders who promote collaboration, trust, empathy, and community participation are more effective in fostering social cohesion and conflict resolution. Hence, the study may serve as a basis for leadership capability-building programs, training seminars, and policy development initiatives focusing on conflict-sensitive governance, peacebuilding leadership, and crisis management. Government institutions, academic organizations, and civil society groups may use the findings in developing leadership enhancement programs for barangay officials and community leaders in conflict-prone areas.

Third, the study demonstrates that community participation and collaboration are essential in sustaining peace and order in remote villages. The active cooperation between leaders and residents strengthened local governance and promoted peaceful conflict management. Consequently, the findings imply that participatory governance and community-based peacebuilding strategies should be continuously strengthened. Community engagement activities, inter-agency partnerships, and grassroots peace initiatives may further improve trust, social cohesion, and collective responsibility within marginalized communities.

Fourth, the findings suggest that peacebuilding efforts should not solely focus on military or security interventions but must also address the socio-economic roots of conflict, including poverty, inequality, unemployment, and social exclusion. Sustainable development programs that prioritize equitable access to resources, education, livelihood opportunities, and social services are necessary in reducing community vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience. Development planners and policymakers may therefore integrate peacebuilding and resilience-building components into local development programs to ensure long-term community stability.

Moreover, the study has important implications for law enforcement agencies, security sectors, and peacekeeping institutions operating in conflict-affected communities. The findings revealed that the presence of military and government security support contributed to the informants' sense of safety and stability. This implies that security interventions should adopt a community-centered and collaborative approach that promotes trust, dialogue, and partnership between authorities and local communities. Community-oriented policing, culturally sensitive security operations, and inclusive peace dialogues may strengthen public confidence and cooperation in maintaining peace and order.

The study likewise contributes practical insights for educators, researchers, and academic institutions, particularly in the fields of criminal justice, public administration, peace studies, and community development. The findings may be integrated into instructional materials, leadership training modules, and extension programs related to conflict resolution, community resilience, and local governance. Additionally, the study may serve as a reference for future research exploring grassroots leadership, peacebuilding strategies, and resilience mechanisms in marginalized and conflict-prone communities.

Finally, the study emphasizes that sustainable peace and development require collective responsibility among government institutions, local leaders, civil society organizations, security sectors, and community members. The experiences and aspirations of the informants demonstrate that peacebuilding is not merely the absence of conflict but a continuous process of collaboration, empowerment, resilience-building, and inclusive governance. Therefore, practical interventions aimed at strengthening local leadership and community resilience are essential in promoting safer, more peaceful, and development-oriented communities in remote areas of Mindanao and similar conflict-affected regions.

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