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## GENDER EQUALITY AMONG SETTLERS IN THE BUFFER ZONES OF SELECTED NATURAL PARKS IN THE BICOL REGION

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined gender participation and support in environmental programs under DENR Region V, focusing on the buffer zones of three protected areas in the Bicol Region: Mayon Volcano Natural Park (MVNP), Mt. Isarog Natural Park (MINP), and Bulusan Volcano Natural Park (BVNP). It assessed gender roles and equality among male, female, and third-sex settlers in conservation efforts, particularly in project planning, implementation, and community management.

The study analyzed settlers' profiles, attitudes, and perceptions using a descriptive-correlational method and survey questionnaires. This study was conducted in 2018 with a follow-up based on the findings in 2021 and 2023. Findings showed active involvement across all genders, including strong community acceptance of LGBTQ participants. Most settlers were middle-aged farmers, with women also running small businesses.

Kendall's Correlation and t-tests revealed highly significant similarities in gender perceptions across the three parks, confirming gender equality in participation and leadership roles. Major challenges identified included a lack of unity, job scarcity, income pressures on women, political interference, and illegal logging.

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As a result, the study recommended integrating three key actions into the DENR's Work and Financial Plan: (1) a solid waste management awareness campaign, (2) training on disaster risk reduction, and (3) orientation on environmental laws and regulations.

**Keywords:** *Gender equality, Gender Role, Settlers, Natural Park*

## INTRODUCTION

The degradation of Earth's natural resources has accelerated with industrialization; as technological advancement increasingly disrupts ecological balance. Pollution, unsustainable exploitation, and overuse of natural resources have led to atmospheric damage, land erosion, rising sea levels, forest depletion, and declining biodiversity. Among the most pressing global issues are climate change and global warming, both of which pose critical threats to humanity.

In the article "Parks" by Kothari (2011), the case of Coron Island in Palawan—a protected area inhabited by the Tagbanwa tribe—was discussed to illustrate evolving conservation paradigms. The article predicted that growing public and community support would lead to reduced conflicts between people and protected areas, greater recognition of indigenous and community-led conservation, and a shift from exclusionary conservation models to more inclusive ones that integrate people and nature.

Despite progress, the *Journal of Women's Empowerment Development and Equality Plan* (2013–2016) noted that women still face challenges in accessing and benefiting from

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natural resources. These challenges are often linked to unsustainable practices and a lack of representation in environmental programs, contributing to poverty in ecologically vulnerable communities.

This study examines gender equality in the conservation and management of natural resources within the buffer zones of selected natural parks in the Bicol Region. These buffer zones, governed by DAO 96-29, permit regulated activities such as agriculture and agroforestry to support sustainable development. The study highlights how inclusive participation—across men, women, and members of the third sex—can strengthen environmental protection and contribute to broader socio-economic and political progress.

The study specifically aimed to:

1. Profile Respondents based on their personal, professional, and economic backgrounds.
2. Assess Gender Participation in various stages of DENR project implementation under the NIPAS Act, including:
  - Preparatory Stage
  - Strengthening Stage
  - Planning Stage
  - Implementation Stage
  - Community Management Stage
3. Identify Problems encountered during these stages.
4. Determine Significant Relationships in participation levels among different genders across project stages.

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5. Analyze Gender Roles in areas such as:

- Leadership
- Decision-making
- Control over land and properties
- Access to financial services

The study underscores that equitable gender roles are crucial for effective resource management and community empowerment.

### Scope and Coverage of the Study

This study focused on three natural parks in the Bicol Region: Bulusan Volcano Natural Park (Sorsogon), Mt. Isarog Natural Park (Camarines Sur), and Mayon Volcano Natural Park (Albay). Park Superintendents recommended selected barangays based on accessibility and safety. Areas with security risks, such as insurgency in Irosin, potential volcanic eruption in Albay, and landslide-prone zones in other provinces, were excluded.

Respondents included on-site settlers of varying gender identities (men, women, LGBTQ+), barangay officials, and DENR personnel such as PASUs and forest rangers. These groups were involved in or affected by the management of natural resources in buffer zones.

The study aligned with Executive Order No. 273 and the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), which promote gender equality in government programs. It aimed to assess whether national policies on gender inclusion translate into equitable participation in conservation efforts at the local level.

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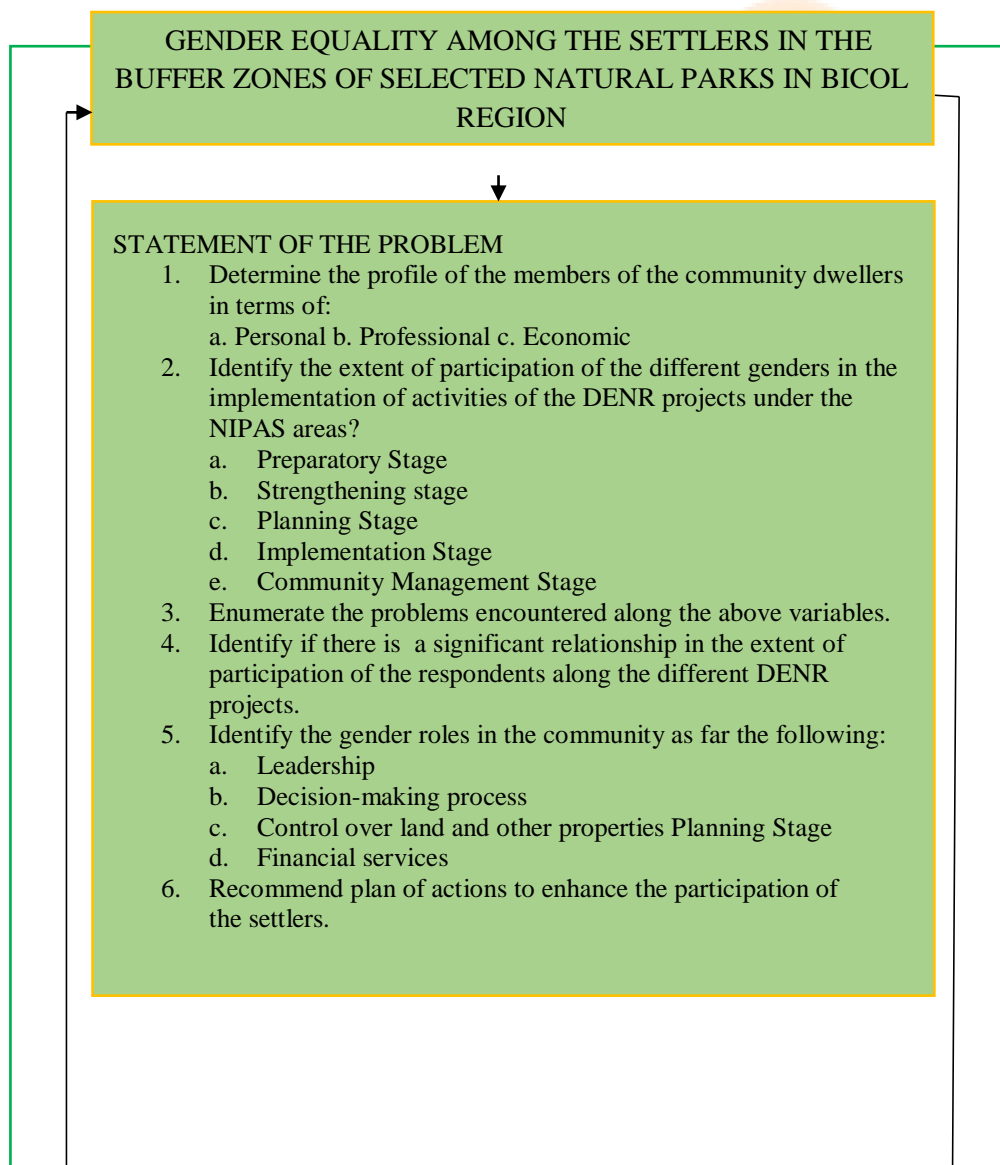
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The PASU plays a critical role in managing protected areas, implementing the NIPAS Act, and engaging communities in conservation work. Guided by feminist and functionalist theories, the study explored whether traditional gender roles persist or have shifted toward more equitable arrangements that support both environmental sustainability and community welfare.



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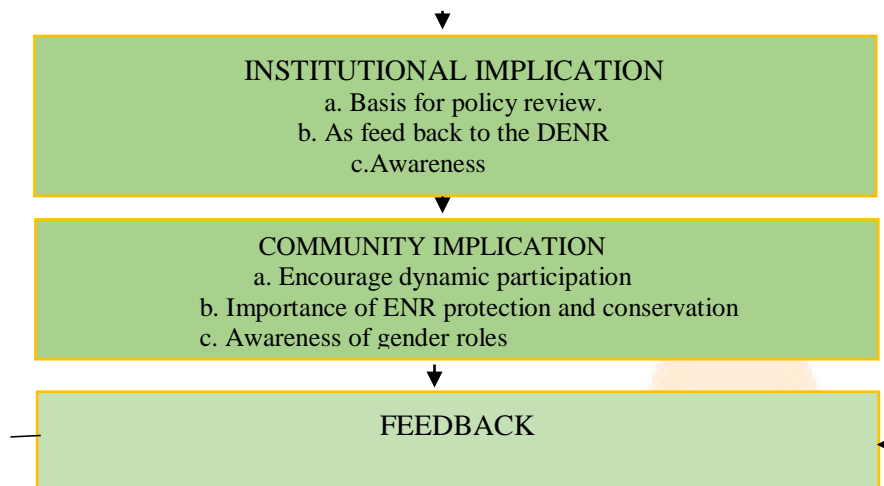


Figure 2.

### The Research Paradigm of the Study

This study examined gender roles among settlers in the buffer zones of protected natural parks, focusing on their participation in conservation efforts. Using feminist and functionalist perspectives, it explored whether traditional male-dominated roles have evolved into more inclusive and equitable dynamics. Residents of these zones, though barred from settling within the parks, play a crucial role in protecting biodiversity. The DENR manages these areas, emphasizing community involvement in conservation planning, implementation, and management.

The study assessed how men, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals engage in these stages, aiming to improve inclusivity and stakeholder participation. It emphasized that gender equality involves shared decision-making, equal access to resources, and economic

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opportunities—key elements in achieving sustainable development and meaningful environmental stewardship. Success, it noted, lies not just in results but in shifting community values and behaviors toward inclusivity and conservation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a descriptive-correlational research method to assess the impact of gender roles on community participation in conserving and protecting natural resources. Data were primarily collected through survey questionnaires, supplemented by interviews and field observations, to gather detailed insights from respondents.

The study population was categorized into three groups:

1. Primary respondents – community dwellers in selected buffer zone areas of three natural parks (Mayon Volcano Natural Park, Bulusan Volcano Natural Park, and Mt. Isarog Natural Park).
2. Secondary respondents – DENR officers overseeing park management.
3. Local Government Unit (LGU) representatives, such as barangay officials.

Specific barangays from each park's buffer zone were chosen. Total enumeration was used for the small populations of DENR and LGU personnel. The questionnaires were based on Garnace & Operio's (2015) study on biodiversity threats in the Bicol National Park.

To analyze the data, the study used various statistical tools:

- Frequency count to determine response rates
- Weighted mean and ranking to assess perceptions

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- Standard deviation to gauge the consistency of responses
- Kendall Rank Correlation to measure relationships between variables
- T-test to compare group perceptions and participation levels

These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics and stakeholder involvement in environmental conservation efforts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The Mayon Volcano Natural Park (MVNP):

The Mayon Volcano Natural Park (MVNP) in Albay is home to communities benefiting from its fertile volcanic soil, especially farmers. The study focused on barangays near the volcano, where residents engage in resource-based livelihoods and participate in conservation programs.

### Profile of MVNP Settlers:

#### Age & Gender:

The majority were middle-aged (51–58 years old).

Gender: 44.85% female, 38.24% male, and 16.91% third sex (LGBTQ+), who are socially accepted and actively involved in community life.

#### Education & Occupation:

44.85% reached high school; 7.35% were illiterate.

68.38% worked as farmers; others were into handicrafts and small businesses.

#### Language & Civil Status:

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67.23% spoke Bicol-Albay.

31.62% were married; a significant number were separated or widowed.

Housing & Income:

44.85% lived in leased homes; 78.51% had lived in the area since birth.

Top income sources: fruits/vegetables, livestock, root crops, copra, and rice.

### Gender Participation in DENR Project Stages (CBFM-based):

Stage	Male	Female	Third Sex
Preparatory	Low (1.76)	None (0.65)	Moderate (3.29)
Strengthening	Low (2.14)	None (1.01)	High (3.89)
Planning	Some (2.11)	None (0.56)	High (3.61)
Implementation	Low (1.78)	None (0.48)	High (3.76)
Community Management	Low (1.87)	Minimal (1.06)	High (3.67)

### Observations:

Males were limited by farming duties.

Females showed very low involvement due to domestic roles.

Third sex individuals had the highest participation, breaking stereotypes and contributing positively across all stages.

### Problems Encountered:

Top Challenges:

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Lack of community unity (“kanya-kanya” mindset).

Job scarcity for men and women.

Limited roles and economic contributions from women.

Underutilization of third-gender capabilities.

The study reveals a clear gender gap in participation, with third-gender individuals showing the strongest involvement in environmental projects. Promoting inclusivity and breaking traditional roles—especially for women—can improve conservation outcomes and community resilience in MVNP.

### Top Problems:

1. No unity
2. Lack of jobs for males and females
3. Limited income contribution from females
4. Political intervention
5. Illegal tree cutting, quarrying, waste issues, lack of cooperation, and financial problems

### 4. Participation Across Project Stages by Gender

Statistical results show varied participation levels:

- Males: Generally had low participation across all stages.
- Females: Consistently reported no participation, often due to domestic roles and passive involvement.
- Third Gender: Had the highest participation, especially in planning and community management.

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The data confirms a significant relationship between gender and participation. As a community-based project, DENR must strengthen awareness to encourage inclusive involvement.

## 5. Gender Roles in MVNP Community Activities

### a. Clean-Up Drives

- Male: 4.09 – Very Satisfactory
- Female: 3.14 – Satisfactory
- Third Gender: 2.34 – Fair

Men continue to lead in public clean-up efforts.

### b. Tree Planting

- Male: 3.14 – Satisfactory
- Female: 2.40 – Fair
- Third Gender: 4.52 – Excellent

Third-gender individuals excel in environmental engagement.

### c. Community Formation Participation

- Male: 4.14 – Participated
- Female & Third Gender: Both – Fair

Males were more active in organizing people’s groups under DENR initiatives.

## 6. Recommended Plan of Action to Enhance Settler Participation (MVNP)

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To improve community involvement in MVNP, the following key activities were

proposed:

Goal	Action	Schedule	Budget (PHP)
Solid Waste Management Awareness	Invite the DENR speaker	1st Quarter	30,000
Disaster Risk Reduction Seminar	Invite DENR and MGB-V speakers	2nd Quarter 2018	10,000
Orientation on Environmental Laws	Conduct by DENR Enforcement/PNP	2nd Quarter 2018	40,000
Magna Carta for Women Training	Invite a DSWD speaker	3rd Quarter 2018	40,000

These initiatives aim to raise awareness, build capacity, and promote inclusive participation in project implementation.

## B. Mt. Isarog Natural Park (MINP)

### 1. Personal Profile of Settlers:

- Age: Most respondents (105 total) are in their productive years (35–58), suggesting a growing and active population.
- Gender: 42.86% female, 36.19% male, 20.95% third sex.
- Dialect: Bicol-Naga is the dominant dialect (59.05%), followed by Rinconada (20%).

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- Civil Status: The Majority are married (52.38%), followed by singles (38.1%).

## 2. Educational Profile:

- Majority (43.4%) reached college level; only 1.89% were illiterate, mostly from the oldest age group.

## 3. Economic Profile:

- Homeownership: 73.33% own homes; others lease or live rent-free.
- Length of Stay: Over 61% have lived in the area since birth, indicating established communities.
- Occupation: 44.76% are farmers, followed by business (24.76%) and fishing/handicraft (11.43%).

## 4. Sources of Income:

- The top earners are corn, rice, and sugarcane farming.
- Other notable sources include copra, livestock, and abaca products.
- Ecotourism ranks low despite the area's potential, suggesting underutilization of natural attractions.

## 5. Environmental Concern:

- A UNDP-ACRE-GEF report identified threats to biodiversity, including inorganic farming, mono-cropping, and agricultural burning, which persist due to limited sustainable practices.

## I Economic Aspects of Respondents (MINP)

### A. Housing Situation

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- Ownership: Majority (73.33%) own their homes, 15.24% lease, and 11.43% have free rentals.
- House Ownership (for rented homes): 50% rent from neighbors, 30% from relatives, and 20% from supervisors.
- Length of Stay: 61.05% have lived there since birth; 22.11% for 3 years or less; 16.84% for more than 3 years.

## B. Occupation

- Most common: Farmers (44.76%), Businessmen (24.76%), Fishermen & Handicraft makers (11.43% each).

## C. Other Sources of Income (Table I.B. 4)

Top income sources remain agricultural:

1. Corn (Rank 1)
2. Rice (Rank 2)
3. Sugarcane (Rank 3)

Despite tourism initiatives (e.g., Panicuason Hot Spring, Tumaguti Falls), ecotourism ranks only 23rd in income sources.

## II. Gender-Based Participation in DENR Project Activities

Participation was assessed across five stages of project implementation:

### A. Key Findings:

- **Highest Participation:** During the *Implementation* and *Community Management* stages.

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- **Lowest Participation:** During the *Preparatory* stage, typically led by DENR and LGU staff.

## B. Summary by Gender:

Stage	Male Participation	Female Participation	Third Participation	Gender
Preparatory	Participated	Moderately Participated	Moderately Participated	
Strengthening	Participated	Moderately Participated	Moderately Participated	
Planning	Moderately Participated	Low Participation	Participated	
Implementation	Moderately Participated	Moderately Participated	Moderately Participated	
Community Management	Moderately Participated	Low Participation	Moderately Participated	

### Notes:

- **Males** were more involved across stages, especially in meetings and coordination efforts.
- **Females** showed low participation in planning and community management activities.
- **Third gender respondents** were moderately involved, showing higher engagement in the planning stage than females.

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Participation is attributed to the residents' familiarity with the projects and long-term involvement, especially among males and IP members living in buffer zones.

**Table 2.B.3: Third Sex Participation in Project Implementation at MINP**

Stage	Indicators	TWM	Interpretation
a. Preparatory	Attending meetings, LGU/PASU coordination, explaining benefits, resolving boundary conflicts	2.67	Moderate participation: highest in explaining benefits (3.69 – Participated)
b. Strengthening	Meeting attendance, PACBRMA processing	2.80	Slightly higher engagement in formal processes; better in application processing
c. Planning	Preparing and approving CRMP	3.71	The highest stage of involvement among all, showing strong participation

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Stage	Indicators	TWM	Interpretation
d.Implementation	Dwellers' involvement, LGU/DENR support	3.15	Consistent participation with slight variations across the support received
e. Mgnt.	Community Bayanihan, law enforcement, waste mgmt., livelihood	2.97	Varied: low in poaching prevention (1.86), high in livelihood equity (4.02)

**Legend:** TWM = Total Weighted Mean, AI = Adjectival Interpretation, MP = Moderate Participation, P = Participated, LP = Low Participation

**Table 3-MINP: Problems Encountered by Stakeholders**

Group	Problems Identified
Settlers	Land encroachment, commercialization, intra-settler conflict, improper waste disposal, poor pest control, lack of market access
Coordinator	Lack of cooperation, poor facility care, limited access to organic farming tech

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Group	Problems Identified
DENR	PASU Illegal logging, kaingin, poaching, garbage disposal, charcoal-making, and
Staff	health service inaccessibility

**Table 4. A: Summary of Participation Across Genders**

Stage	Male	Female	Third Sex	Overall Average
a. Preparatory	3.52 / P	3.04 / MP	2.67 / MP	3.08
b. Strengthening	4.07 / P	3.02 / MP	2.80 / MP	3.30
c. Planning	2.78 / MP	1.52 / LP	3.71 / P	2.67
d. Implementation	3.26 / MP	2.73 / MP	3.15 / MP	3.05
e. Community Mgmt.	3.16 / MP	2.06 / MP	2.97 / MP	2.73

**Observation:** All genders show moderate participation, with third sex highest in planning and livelihood efforts, yet lower in community management enforcement.

**Table 5.b: Gender Roles in the Community**

**Table 5.b.1 – Male**

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<b>Indicator</b>	<b>TWM</b>
Clean-up drive	3.77 Very Satisfactory
Tree planting	4.71 Excellent
On-site dwellers' activity	3.40 Satisfactory
Land ownership	4.93 Excellent
Budgeting knowledge	3.79 Very Satisfactory

**Table 5.b.2 – Female**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>TWM</b>
Clean-up drive	3.37 Very Satisfactory
Tree planting	3.80 Very Satisfactory
On-site dwellers' activity	4.11 Satisfactory
Land ownership	3.56 Very Satisfactory
Budgeting knowledge	3.11 Fair

**Table 5.b.3 – Third Sex**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>TWM</b>
Clean-up drive	2.14 Fair
Tree planting	3.32 Satisfactory

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Indicator	TWM
On-site dwellers' activity	3.17 Satisfactory
Land ownership	3.27 Satisfactory
Budgeting knowledge	4.54 Excellent

### Insights:

- Third sex excels in budgeting knowledge.
- Participation is lowest in clean-up and community volunteerism.
- Males lead in physical tasks (tree planting), while females are strong in activity and engagement.

**Table 6. B: Recommended Plan of Action**

Goal	Action/Steps	Timeframe	Budget (PHP)
1. Inventory tourist sites	PASU and PO to conduct a survey	1st Quarter 2018	15,000
2. Define forest boundaries	Coordinate with DENR	2nd Quarter 2018	5,000
3. Orientation on environmental laws	on Training by Chief Enforcement & PNP	2nd Quarter 2018	40,000

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Goal	Action/Steps	Timeframe	Budget (PHP)
4. Rights awareness for women & children	Magna Carta training via DSWD	3rd Quarter 2018	40,000
5. Organic farming promotion	Request a DA trainer for capacity-building	4th Quarter 2018	20,000

### Strategy Summary:

- Focused on environmental awareness, rights education, and sustainable practices.
- Inclusion of third sex, women, and children emphasized in future training modules.
- Implementation led by DENR, LGU, and community in a multi-stakeholder approach.

### The Bulusan Volcano Natural Park (BVNP)

BVNP, located in Sorsogon, is a vital ecological area supplying freshwater for agricultural and domestic use. It features rivers, springs, and diverse biodiversity with ten dominant flora species and several threatened species due to human activity. A Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) and a local People’s Organization co-manage the park to promote conservation, ecotourism, and sustainable livelihoods.

### Profile of Settlers in the BVNP Buffer Zone

Data from 105 respondents across three barangays (San Francisco, San Roque, and Mapaso) revealed the following:

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## A. Personal Profile

- Age: The Majority (47.63%) are aged 43–58; only 8.57% are youth (19–26).
- Gender: 51.43% male, 31.43% female, 17.14% identify as third sex.
- Dialect: Bicol-Sorsogon is dominant (78.1%), followed by Tagalog (11.42%) and Bicol-Albay (10.48%).
- Civil Status: Most are married (52.38%), with 38.1% single.

## B. Educational Background

- 36.19% reached college level, 32.38% finished high school.
- A small fraction (2.86%) is illiterate, mainly from the older age groups.

## C. Economic Profile

- Homeownership: 77.14% own their homes; others rent (16.19%) or live rent-free (6.67%).
- House Source: Renters mostly lease from neighbors (54.17%) or relatives (41.67%).
- Length of Stay: 72.38% have lived in the area since birth, indicating strong community roots.
- Occupations: Main livelihoods include farming (29.52%), business (25.71%), and handicraft-making (25.71%).

## d. Occupation of Settlers

Most respondents were farmers (29.52%), followed by businessmen and handicraft-makers (25.71% each). The least common occupation was house help (2.86%). Many women managed sari-sari stores, while others were involved in shell-craft and abaca-based products.

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Main sources of income included the sale of root crops, handicraft-making, and livestock raising (carabao and cattle), benefiting from the area’s wide grasslands. Ecotourism ranked fifth, with locals serving as guides and staff in ecotourism sites organized by AGAP Inc., a recognized environmental group.

Some men also worked as construction laborers outside the area due to limited local income opportunities, opting not to rely on forest resources for livelihood.

**Table I.C.4:**

**Top 10 Other Sources of Income of Settlers/ Respondents**

Source of Income	Total Respondents	Rank
Root crops	60	1
Handicraft Making	40	2
Carabao Raising	39	3
Cattle Raising	25	4
Eco-tourism Guide	22	5
Business (Sari-sari, etc.)	20	6
Piggery	15	7
Construction Work	14	8
Poultry	10	9
Fruits & Vegetables	10	9

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## 2. C Extent of Gender Participation in DENR Project Activities in BVNP

This section examines the participation levels of male, female, and third-sex respondents from buffer zones in various stages of DENR projects within the Bulusan Volcano Natural Park (BVNP).

### Preparatory Stage:

Male respondents showed *no to low participation*, while females and third-sex respondents had *low participation*. This may be attributed to pre-existing community organizations and ongoing interventions from DENR, reducing the need for broader engagement during the early stages.

### Strengthening Stage:

Males again showed *low participation*. In contrast, females participated more actively (mean: 3.96), and third-sex individuals moderately participated (mean: 3.20). Men were often preoccupied with livelihood tasks, limiting their involvement.

### Planning Stage:

Males demonstrated *limited participation*, females had *no participation*, while third-sex respondents actively joined (mean: 3.86), indicating their emerging role in community planning.

### Implementation Stage:

Participation increased among females (mean: 3.34) and third-sex respondents (mean: 3.33), both at *moderate levels*, while males still lagged with *low participation*. This

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suggests higher engagement from women and third-sex individuals in carrying out project activities.

### Community Management Stage:

Males maintained *low participation*, females showed *moderate participation*, and third-sex respondents reached the "*participated*" level. Notably, all groups scored low in sub-indicators related to *Bayanihan spirit*, reflecting shared concerns over community involvement and responsibility.

### Summary:

Across all stages, males consistently showed lower participation, especially in the preparatory and community management phases. In contrast, females and third-sex individuals were more actively involved, particularly during implementation and management. These findings highlight a shift in gender roles and the increasing contribution of often-overlooked groups in environmental initiatives.

**Table 2.C.2 (Female Participation)** and **Table 2.C.3 (Third Sex Participation)** in the DENR project implementation at BVNP. This version summarizes participation by stage, highlighting the Total Weighted Mean (TWM) and Adjectival Interpretation (AI) without listing all raw frequencies and weights:

**Table 2.C.2 – Female Participation in Project Implementation (n=33)**

Project Stage	TWM	AI
Preparatory	2.33	Low Participation
Strengthening	3.96	Participated

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<b>Project Stage</b>	<b>TWM AI</b>
Planning	2.70 Moderate Participation
Implementation	3.34 Moderate Participation
Community Management	2.59 Moderate Participation

**Table 2.C.3 – Third Sex Participation in Project Implementation (n=18)**

<b>Project Stage</b>	<b>TWM AI</b>
Preparatory	2.31 Low Participation
Strengthening	3.20 Moderate Participation
Planning	3.86 Participated
Implementation	3.33 Moderate Participation
Community Management	3.71 Participated

### **C. Problems Encountered in Project Implementation at BVNP**

Settlers, LGU, and DENR staff reported various issues during project implementation, varying by role. Settlers identified six main problems, LGU three, and DENR seven. Common concerns included:

- Improper solid waste management
- Illegal logging and poaching
- Peace and order issues
- Landslides and poor road conditions
- Lack of cooperation, livelihood projects, and concern from some settlers

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- Encroachment of protected areas
- Non-compliance with environmental rules and waste segregation

#### 4.C. Participation by Gender

Table 4.C reveals that **female, and third sex respondents showed moderate to high participation**, particularly in **planning, implementation, and community management**. **Male participation remained low across most stages**.

Stage	Male (AI)	Female (AI)	Third Sex (AI)	Interpretation
Preparatory	LP	LP	LP	Low Participation
Strengthening	LP	P	MP	Moderate Participation
Planning	LP	MP	P	Moderate to High
Implementation	LP	MP	MP	Moderate Participation
Community Management	LP	MP	P	Moderate to High

#### 5.C. Gender Roles in the Community

##### Leadership:

- Males and third sex rated "Very Satisfactory" in tree planting;
- **Females rated "Excellent"**, indicating strong leadership.

##### On-site Activeness:

- **Females and third sex rated "Excellent"** in active participation in community tasks.

##### Land Ownership:

- Females scored "**Excellent**" in land ownership roles; others were "Very Satisfactory".

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## Budgeting Skills:

- All genders demonstrated "Very Satisfactory" knowledge.

## 6.C. Recommended Actions

To address implementation issues, a **multi-agency action plan** was created, including:

1. Information Campaigns on Waste Management
2. Disaster Risk Reduction Seminars
3. Environmental Law Training for settlers
4. Magna Carta for Women Orientation
5. Education on Wildlife Conservation
6. Peace and Order Coordination with local authorities

## Significant Relationships on Respondents' Participation

To determine whether gender influences participation across natural parks, the Kendall Rank Correlation was used. Results showed a highly significant correlation among the perceptions of the three gender groups across the parks ( $t = 480$ ; critical values: 1.96 at 5%, 2.58 at 1%).

In the Mayon Volcano and Mt. Isarog Natural Parks, "Strengthening" ranked highest in participation.

In Bulusan Volcano Natural Park, "Planning" was ranked highest.

The Preparatory stage consistently ranked lowest for MVNP and BVNP, showing limited involvement across genders early in the process.

Community Management ranked moderately (3rd) for both BVNP and MINP.

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These findings confirm a strong alignment in gender-based perceptions of participation across different stages and parks, supporting the presence of gender equality in community engagement.

**Table 7**

**Significant Relationships on the Extent of Participation of the Respondents**

INDICATORS	MVNP		MINP		BVNP		x	x <sup>3</sup>
	Ratin g	Rank	Rating	Rank	Ratin g	Rank		
1. Preparatory	1.90	5	1.22	5	3.08	2	12	144
2. Strengthenin g	2.35	1	3.08	2	3.30	1	4	16
3. Planning	2.10	3	3.69	1	2.67	5	9	81
4. Implementati on	2.01	4	2.93	3	3.05	3	10	100
5. Community Management	2.20	2	2.64	4	2.73	4	10	100

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							Ex=4	
							5	$\Sigma x^2$

## CONCLUSION:

The study revealed a highly significant relationship in participation levels across genders and parks, indicating a shared perception and experience in project involvement. While “Strengthening” was most participated in for MVNP and MINP, and “Planning” for BVNP, the Preparatory stage consistently showed the least engagement. Overall, the results affirm the existence of gender equality in community participation within the natural parks.

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