

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

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This study explored the establishment, implementation, and challenges of the pioneering Women-Managed Area (WMA) of the Tagbanwa Indigenous People (IP) in Calauit Island, Palawan, Philippines. Drawing from focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) with community members and local leaders, the case study explored how Indigenous women assumed greater stewardship roles that are traditionally dominated by men. In this case, through the management of a traditional fishing ground of or *cachipay*, an endemic windowpane oyster (*Placuna* sp.) in the area. The Calauit Island WMA was assessed across ten interrelated themes: (1) establishment and leadership, (2) community and gender dynamics, (3) policy and legal context, (4) capacity training, (5) economic outcomes, (6) environmental monitoring, (7) sustainability and funding, (8) coordination and partnerships, (9) lessons and replicability, and (10) strategic directions for the future. A deductive thematic analysis was employed, wherein transcripts from the FGDs and KIIs were then coded and categorized based on the predefined themes that framed the exploration of the WMA's establishment, implementation, and challenges.

The results of the study show that through the establishment of the first WMA in the country, the Tagbanwa women were granted formal management rights over the ancestral waters that their IP community struggled to claim as part of their ancestral domain. With the support of non-government organizations (NGOs) and other partners, the WMA benefited from training and support such as in livelihood development, ecological monitoring, and law enforcement. However, the lack of sustained income for the women members and the absence of policy and legal reinforcement in the municipality surfaced as major challenges. Jurisdictional ambiguity and the lack of recognition of ancestral domain rights by outsiders further constrained enforcement. Although environmental monitoring practices were in place, the inconsistent *cachipay* supply that is greatly affected by the poaching of outsiders led to ecological and organizational decline as the operating expenses and plans of the women's association were greatly anchored to this resource. These findings emphasize the importance of consistent financial income among women members, inter-agency coordination, and early market integration for the success of community-based and women-led conservation initiatives. Despite these obstacles, the WMA promotes women's empowerment and highlights strategies for enhancing their leadership in resource management. The findings advocate for a blue economy that recognizes the vital role of Indigenous women in marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods.