



October holds special significance as we celebrate **National Indigenous Peoples Month** in the Philippines, a commemoration deeply intertwined with the essence of education. This observance originates in Proclamation No. 1906, issued in 2009, marking the signing of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act on October 29, 1997.

The Department of Education developed a policy framework institutionalizing Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) in 2011 as a response to the right of Indigenous Peoples (IP) to a basic education that is sensitive to their context, respects their identities, and promotes the value of their indigenous knowledge, skills, and other aspects of their cultural heritage. However, after 26 years since the passage of IPRA, obstacles still persist, hindering IP learners from accessing quality education as they pursue their studies at various institutions. Indigenous communities continue to grapple with land-related harassment, attacks, and tragic incidents.

A youth-led action research was recently conducted by Lubos na Alyansa ng mga Katutubong Ayta sa Sambales Kabataan (LAKAS Youth) in partnership with E-Net Philippines and Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in the Asia South Pacific (ASPBAE). It collected comprehensive data on the experiences of Ayta learners. A thorough analysis of the data revealed several significant findings. Firstly, the study showed that Ayta students frequently face verbal bullying, which involves offensive comments about their race, along with mockery of their curly hair and dark skin. This verbal abuse has led to symptoms of trauma, resulting in stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and long-term adverse effects such as school dropout and reluctance to wear their traditional clothing. While most IP learners attend public schools and government-funded institutions, a significant number face financial obstacles that impede their academic progress. Unexpected school financial contributions strain their limited resources, as these learners often allocate their allowance solely for transportation and food. The research provided recommendations that are not just insightful but also critical steps toward addressing the pressing issues faced by indigenous communities.

E-Net Philippines strongly recognizes the significant role of education in preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of indigenous communities. We remain committed to advocating for the protection of indigenous peoples, with a particular focus on children in conflict and those affected by land-grabbing challenges. **We call upon local government units to ensure uninterrupted access to healthcare and education for indigenous communities, contributing to their overall well-being.**

We fervently call upon the government to heed the voices of our Indigenous People and take meaningful actions:

1. **Anti-Bullying Measures:** These are essential to intensify anti-bullying policies at all educational levels, responding promptly to such behavior. These policies should also include initiatives to raise awareness about the culture and rights of indigenous peoples, ultimately reducing or eradicating racial discrimination.
2. **Self-Esteem Workshops:** Conducting seminars and workshops for IP learners to help them discover their self-concept, realize their self-worth, boost their confidence, and overcome negative self-perceptions is vital for their personal growth.
3. **Teacher Training:** Training and seminars for teachers, focusing on understanding the learning preferences of IP learners, should be provided. This understanding can be a foundation for tailored teaching and learning strategies, especially in areas where IP learners face challenges.
4. **Scholarships and Financial Assistance:** Offering scholarships and financial aid for IP students, especially at the college level, is instrumental in making education accessible and reducing financial barriers.
5. **Infrastructure and Facility Upgrade:** Enhancements to educational facilities, such as improved room ventilation to create a conducive learning environment and a consistent water supply for health and hygiene, are essential for the well-being of students.
7. **Support for Indigenous Knowledge:** Supporting the facilitators of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) by funding their salaries and providing necessary teaching materials is essential in preserving and passing on traditional knowledge.
8. **Continuous Improvement of MTB-MLE:** Improve the implementation of mother tongue in instruction alongside local contexts and needs, community involvement and allocating dedicated resources to support it.

By implementing these recommendations, we can collectively work towards a more inclusive and equitable education system that respects the rights and values of our Indigenous People. **Our shared responsibility is to ensure that every IP learner has the opportunity to flourish, learn, and contribute to the rich tapestry of our nation's cultural diversity.** Let us unite in this endeavor to uphold the dignity and potential of our Indigenous People through education. ###