

The Influence of Perceived Stakeholder Classification of Beneficiaries on the Levels of Beneficiary Participation in Philippine NGOs

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ABSTRACT

The study explores beneficiary participation in the context of two Philippine development NGOs. The research investigates the levels of beneficiary participation based on a participation typology. It also aims to identify the perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries by the NGO board of trustees, managers, and beneficiaries themselves. Finally, it seeks to understand how the perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries affects beneficiary participation. Utilizing a qualitative design through a multiple-case strategy, the study reveals that beneficiaries participate through participatory levels of consultation and information, public involvement, and negotiation and bargaining. All the managers perceive beneficiaries as collaborators, and the beneficiaries share the same perception of themselves. The study shows the pivotal role of management's perception in shaping beneficiary participation. Simultaneously, the beneficiaries' self-perception as collaborators encourages beneficiary participation. These findings highlight the significance of leadership perception in fostering active beneficiary participation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of beneficiary participation. It offers insights for NGO leaders in high power distance countries to reflect on the intrinsic dignity and agency of the people they serve.

Keywords: beneficiary participation, perceived stakeholders classification, SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, high power distance countries, civil society engagement

Poverty in the Philippines had reached an alarming 18.8 percent, affecting an estimated 19.99 million people by the close of 2021 (Mapa, 2022). In addition to struggling to meet their basic food and non-food needs, the impoverished population of the Philippines appears powerless and voiceless (Clarke & Sison, 2003). In response to this dire situation, conscientious citizens have established non-government organizations (NGOs) dedicated to addressing poverty and injustice.

Development NGOs are non-government organizations with a mission to uplift people's quality of life, encompassing economic, political, and social aspects (Lewis, 1998; 2006). In the local context, Aldaba (2002) characterizes development NGOs as organizations primarily rooted in the middle class, offering a range of services, including training, community organization, healthcare, and livelihood

support "directly to grassroots communities and other marginalized groups" (Aldaba, 2002, p. 3). Given their critical role in national development (The Philippine Constitution, 1987), it is imperative to ensure that NGOs fulfill their commitments to beneficiaries. The principle of downward accountability, which holds NGOs accountable to the individuals who benefit from their services (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016; Bryan et al., 2021; Ebrahim, 2003), becomes crucial.

The literature accentuates beneficiary participation as a means to achieve downward accountability (Chu, 2015; Ebrahim, 2003; Lai & Hamilton, 2020; Mooketsane et al., 2018; Noor, 2015). Western scholars emphasize that beneficiary participation empowers beneficiaries to voice their needs and concerns (Lai & Hamilton, 2020; Mooketsane et al., 2018; Wellens & Jegers, 2011). Multilateral agencies argue that participation aligns

with the needs of local communities (Cornwall, 2006; Mubita et al., 2017).

Countries with low power distance more readily embrace the concept of beneficiary participation. Power distance, as elucidated by Hofstede (2011), pertains to the extent to which members of a society accept unequal power and authority (Hofstede, 2011). High power distance societies uphold hierarchical structures in families, schools, workplaces, and society (Muega et al., 2016; Hofstede, 2011). Those with less power and lower stature rarely engage in open dialogue with authority figures (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 2011; Muega et al., 2016). In contrast, low power distance countries champion egalitarian principles. These societies encourage individuals to voice their opinions and participate in discussions regardless of their social status.

Empirical studies reveal a high power distance culture in various Filipino settings, including within households (Alampay & Jocson, 2011), between doctors and patients (Lawton et al., 2015), and in Filipino doctor-nurse relationships (Choi et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the research by Muega, Acido, and Lusung-Oyzo (2016) suggests that a low power distance relationship may exist between Filipino teachers and students. Filipino students freely speak their minds and communicate with their teachers even if they come from high power distance homes (Muega et al., 2016). Against this backdrop, a pilot study involving ten Philippine NGOs reveals a significant lack of beneficiary participation in decision-making processes (Aguiling, 2021), affirming a high power distance culture within these organizations.

However, some local development NGOs claim to practice beneficiary participation, albeit to a limited extent. How do these local NGOs engage their beneficiaries to participate? How do NGO leaders, vested with power, perceive their beneficiaries? Does their perception have a bearing on the practice of beneficiary participation? Do beneficiaries perceive themselves in a position to participate? How do the beneficiaries' self-perception relate to their participation?

Remarkably, there needs to be more studies examining the perception of NGO stakeholders regarding the roles of beneficiaries in high power distance countries and the influence of these perceptions on beneficiary participation. This research paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the participation levels exhibited by beneficiaries of Philippine NGOs in their respective programs?
2. In the move towards beneficiary participation, what is the perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries in the NGO program
 - 2.1. by the NGO Board of Trustees?
 - 2.2. by the NGO management?
 - 2.3. by the NGO beneficiaries themselves?
3. How does the perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries affect the practice of beneficiary participation?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Beneficiary Participation

Beneficiary participation is a means to give beneficiaries the faculty to influence an organizational decision or the direction of a project (Afram et al., 2015; Aga et al., 2018; Mercelis et al., 2016). Their participation may come in the form of providing feedback and suggestions (Aguiling, 2021; Chu & Luke, 2018; LeRoux, 2009; Wellens & Jegers, 2016), working in partnership with groups (Bhatt, 1997; Brett, 2003; Chu, 2015), deliberating with agencies (Ebrahim, 2003; Mercelis et al., 2016), managing resources (Aga et al., 2018; Brett, 2003) and initiating actions separate from the organization (Ebrahim, 2003; Pretty, 1995). Some scholars express that the beneficiaries' contribution of labor or funds to a project likewise constitutes participation (Ebrahim, 2003; Kutter, 2014; Madajewicz et al., 2017). Nonetheless, Western scholars stress that genuine participation occurs only when beneficiaries participate in decision-making or control of resources (Aga et al., 2018; Ebrahim, 2003; Flint & Blyth, 2021).

Scholars have designed and adopted varied typologies of participation (Arnstein 1969; Paul, 1987; Pretty, 1995; Bhatt, 1997; Ebrahim, 2003). Ebrahim (2003) specified different levels of participation of beneficiaries in NGOs. He explained that the first level of participation occurs when participants are *informed* or *consulted* about a planned project. Examples are public meetings, surveys, and formal dialogue on project options. The project organizers still make the decisions (Ebrahim, 2003). The second level refers to

the *participant's involvement* in actual project-related activities. This level includes contributing labor and funds for project implementation or maintenance of services or facilities (Ebrahim, 2003). The third level transpires when citizens *negotiate* and *bargain* with NGOs or government agencies on their decisions or even hold veto power over their choices. At this level, beneficiaries gain control over resources and activities (Ebrahim, 2003). They express constructive feedback or complaints and negotiate the NGO's actions, direction, and outcomes (Chu, 2015). The fourth level pertains to people taking *initiatives* independently of NGO and government-sponsored projects. This level includes social movements, actions of local resistance, and civil disobedience (Ebrahim, 2003). The first two forms resonate with a top-down approach where beneficiaries minimally participate in decision-making power (Ebrahim, 2003). Simultaneously, Ebrahim (2003) claims that the NGO practice downward accountability only when beneficiaries actively participate in crucial decision-making processes and share in the power to control projects (Ebrahim, 2003). Nonetheless, some entities claim that weak participation is valuable and advantageous (Brett, 2003).

Stakeholder Classification

A stakeholder is an individual or grouping that can impact an organization's actions or be impacted by them (Freeman, 2005). Scholars have recognized the existence of various stakeholder groups and have proposed diverse stakeholder classifications (Mainardes et al., 2011; McGrath & Whitty, 2017; Miles, 2017; Mitchell et al., 1997). Jones and Wicks (1999), Phillips (2003), Donaldson and Preston (1995), and Miles (2017) highlight that the essence of stakeholders is in their relationship with the organization. Miles (2017) generates four core stakeholder classifications: *influencer*, *claimant*, *collaborator*, and *recipient*. An *influencer* is an individual or group that deliberately strategizes to induce the decisions and activities of an organization (Miles, 2017). A *claimant* is an individual or group actively pursuing their claim, although they may be short of the power to influence management to heed their claim (Miles, 2017). A *collaborator* cooperates with the organization (Miles, 2017). However, he may not have the clout and interest to influence the organization (Miles, 2017) actively. Finally, a *recipient* is an individual or group that passively receives the impact of the organization (Miles, 2017). Recipients

do not actively seek to influence the organization and do not demand their claim (Miles, 2017). He expounds that influencers and collaborators affect, impact, or influence the organization, whereas claimants and recipients are affected, impacted, and influenced (Miles, 2017). Miles (2017) elaborates that these classifications are not mutually exclusive. Some stakeholders take on combined classifications.

Perception on Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries hold a recognized stake in NGOs, as acknowledged by various studies (Aga et al., 2018; Chu & Luke, 2018; Mercelis et al., 2016; Trujillo, 2018). However, the use of the term "beneficiaries" tends to reinforce the notion that they are passive recipients who are fortunate to receive assistance (Chu, 2015; Flint & Blyth, 2021). When authorities and donors view beneficiaries merely as recipients, it often leads to a top-down approach that hampers genuine participation (Chu, 2015; Flint & Blyth, 2021).

A leader's perception of beneficiaries affects the program's design and the beneficiaries' role in that process (Bhatt, 1997; Flint & Blyth, 2021). When leaders perceive beneficiaries as participants, partners, customers, or end users, the design process becomes more participatory and meaningful (Chu, 2015; Flint & Blyth, 2021). Treating them as consumers and clients reflects an organizational commitment to serving the needs and wants of the beneficiaries (Flint & Blyth, 2021).

METHOD

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative design with an inductive approach, utilizing a multiple case study methodology. Case study research involves the "investigation and analysis of a single or collective case, intended to capture the complexity of the object of study" (Stake, 1995 as cited by Hyett et al., 2014, p. 2). This study explores how beneficiary participation, the identified phenomenon under examination, is practiced in two non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Given the infrequent occurrence of beneficiary participation in NGOs (Aguiling, 2021), identifying suitable NGOs presented challenges. As a result, the researcher employed purposeful sampling, a method used in qualitative research to obtain rich data (Quinn

Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling aims to provide “insights about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (Quinn Patton, 2015, p. 46). The selected cases are exemplary instances of beneficiary participation in development NGOs. These cases meet specific criteria, including being registered with the Philippine Securities of Exchange and Commission, operating independently (not as branches of international NGOs), engaged in service delivery projects, servicing financially impoverished beneficiaries, and maintaining interactions with these beneficiaries for over a year.

NGOs hardly feature their engagement in beneficiary participation in their public profiles. Consequently, the researcher reached out to professional contacts and organizations with established networks with NGOs. The directors of two NGOs consented to participate in the study. Both NGOs have been operating for over 20 years, employ less than 50 personnel, handle more than one development project, and service indigent children and youth. The shared characteristics between the two organizations facilitate the process of identifying potential patterns of convergence.

Data Collection Methods

The case study employed a multi-faceted approach to data collection, integrating various perspectives and techniques (Marshall & Rossmann, 2016). Data was gathered (Merriam, 1998; Yazan & De Vasconcelos, 2016) through document analysis, semi-structured interviews with the NGO board and managers, as well as *pagtatanong-tanong* (asking questions), and *pakikipagkuwentuhan* (exchanging stories) (Pe-Pua, 1989; 2005) with beneficiaries through online platforms. The utilization of online data gathering is justifiable (Salmons, 2012), especially considering the intermittent spikes in COVID-19 cases and extended government restrictions. Additionally, key informants would resort to virtual communication for both academic and professional purposes since the quarantine period.

The research had 38 respondents consisting of four board trustees (two from NGO-1 and two from NGO-2), six NGO managers (four from NGO-1 and two from NGO-2), twenty-one current beneficiaries (eleven from NGO-1 and ten from NGO-2), and seven

former beneficiaries (five from NGO-1 and two from NGO-2). Three current beneficiaries from NGO-1 and three from NGO-2 were minors.

Data Analysis

Ebrahim’s (2003) typology was used to assess the levels of participation in order to answer the first research question. The typology encompasses beneficiary contributions in terms of money, labor, action, ideas, and leadership, which allows for a broad classification of beneficiary participation.

Miles’ (2017) core stakeholder classification was employed as a reference for the second research question. Finally, the findings from the trustees, management, and beneficiaries answered the third question. The perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries influences beneficiary participation when the board trustees and members perceive beneficiaries not as mere recipients but as influencers, collaborators, or claimants and engage beneficiaries through information and consultation, public involvement, negotiation, and bargaining, or people’s initiatives. The beneficiaries’ perceived stakeholder classification of themselves influences the practice of participation when they perceive themselves as not mere recipients and that they participate through the levels of information and consultation, public involvement, negotiation and bargaining, or people’s initiatives.

The researcher analyzed the findings generated from each case using coding and themes (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Langley & Abdallah, 2011), then proceeded to cross-case pattern analysis to identify commonalities among cases. Cross-case pattern analysis refers to “descriptions of actions, perceptions, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that are similar enough to be considered a manifestation of the same thing” (Quinn Patton, 2015, p. 551).

The narratives of beneficiaries were studied to find support for the accounts of the NGO leaders. Simultaneously, the stories of trustees and management were used to elucidate the beneficiaries’ stories. The researcher conferred with her research assistant regarding her evaluation for investigator triangulation.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Internal validity was enhanced through data source triangulation and member checks (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yazan & De Vasconcelos, 2016). In line with Merriam's (1998) suggestions, external validity was fortified by incorporating thick descriptions, multiple cases, and categorizing respondents' statements into aggregate dimensions. Reliability, following Stake's (1995) guidance, was reinforced through the utilization of both data source triangulation and investigator triangulation.

The study adhered to research guidelines set by *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Pe-Pua, 2005), employing the native language and methods of inquiry comfortable for the participants (Enriquez, 1990; Pe-Pua, 2005; Santiago & Enriquez, 1976). The researcher obtained informed consent from the Board of Trustees and managers, informed consent written in Filipino from beneficiaries eighteen years old and above, parental consent from the parents or guardians of beneficiaries eighteen years old and below, and simple assent from beneficiaries twelve to fifteen years of age. Moreover, she ensured transparency regarding the research topic, the right to withdraw at any time, and respected anonymity preferences. Draft reports were shared with the NGO leaders for member checking. While most NGO leaders consented to reveal their names and the organization, this paper preserves anonymity. The designated Ethics Review Committee approved the study protocol and the final report of the research.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the techniques and perspectives of the key respondents identified in the Data Collection Methods.

Profiles of NGOs

NGO-1

NGO-1 supports underprivileged Filipino children and youth by partnering with families, schools, and communities to reintegrate those who have dropped out or are at risk of doing so. Their Educational Assistance program provides K-12 students with school supplies and uniforms, adapting to electronic devices during the pandemic. Additionally, they offer a Tutorial Program, enlisting high school and former beneficiaries as Junior Educators to help students

improve in Reading, English, and Math.

The Board of Trustees, comprising priests, business professionals, educators, and lawyers, provides guidance, oversight, and assistance. The Chairman and select trustees in the Executive Committee actively participate in strategic and operational planning sessions, and engage with the management and beneficiaries. The management team consists of the Executive Director and five other officers. They believe in the social work method of community organizing, where beneficiaries are engaged to participate and work together.

NGO-2

NGO-2 is a charitable, cultural, and social welfare nonprofit established in the Philippines. It aims to invigorate the lives of the youth who need special protection. One of their main programs is the Residential Care, which is a home-based program for girls sexually abused, exploited, and trafficked. They also offer a Child Protection Mobile Clinic, where they give formative talks and counseling on child protection for children and parents in communities, and Youth Helping Youth program, where they train youth leaders to be speakers and facilitators.

The board is composed of nuns together with professionals and homemakers. The primary role of the board of trustees is to give moral and financial support to the nuns who are at the forefront of running entities and programs. The program manager of the Residential Care is also a board trustee. Two other nuns assist the program manager in the residence.

Levels of Participation

NGO-1

The NGO-1 has established the Barangay Children Association as a platform for child beneficiaries to engage actively in various activities. One of the key events organized is an annual overnight workshop. During this workshop, the association's officers meticulously craft the yearly calendar of activities. Subsequently, they present and defend this plan before the Executive Director and social workers. Once negotiations are complete and the plan is finalized, the officers convene Monthly Meetings to assess their activities and refine their strategies for upcoming months. They then share their findings with parent leaders and social workers, engaging in collaborative decision-making. Throughout the year,

both officers and members participate in Cluster Meetings. These are localized gatherings where they express their issues and concerns. Another event is the General Assembly, attended by all the constituents from five cities in Metro Manila. The officers and members evaluate past activities and give constructive suggestions for future endeavors. This assembly allows children and youth to freely discuss with parent leaders and social workers and agree on action items.

Regarding the Tutorial Program, the Junior Educators conduct surveys to assess the abilities and limitations of their tutees. Based on their findings, they make informed decisions on adapting or modifying the modules provided by the social workers to facilitate the comprehension of their tutees.

NGO-2

Upon the girls' arrival at the Residential Care facility, the management takes into account their preferences when assigning household chores. After a month of setting in, the girls share their experiences in monthly meetings with a member of the management team and a social worker. During these discussions, some girls may request changes in their assignments.

The girls actively participate in planning, organizing, and hosting various in-house events, including birthdays, sports festivals, and gratitude day. At times, they engage in constructive negotiations with the management regarding the event's content, and in some cases, their proposals are readily approved.

Furthermore, some of the girls take on the responsibility of conducting advocacy training sessions in schools and communities, addressing current issues such as the Safe Space Act. In these instances, the girls take the initiative to write and develop the training script. They present and articulate their script to the management, defending and discussing the contents. Upon agreement, the girls proceed to execute the training sessions.

Perceived Stakeholder Classification of Beneficiaries

By the Board of Trustees

NGO-1

The Chairman maintains regular formal and informal interactions with the board's executive

committee to ensure seamless coordination of activities. Simultaneously, he convenes monthly meetings with the entire board. He emphasizes that their beneficiaries are partners regardless of their age. He asserts, "*Children are not tools; they are not objects*". Treating them merely as recipients contradicts the NGO's core beliefs. He passionately articulates that child beneficiaries, as human beings, possess inherent rights to participate in the foundation. He said, "*In fact, we always say the rights of children are not given to them...The fact that they exist, they have rights...It is by their very nature that they are human beings, and these are rights we must respect... listening to them is part of their right... The right to form their own opinion, the right to say 'no' to the programs and projects, and the right to participate. All of that is integral to their being human beings, whether children or adults...*"

Another board trustee, Mrs. Y, while not part of the Executive Committee, attends events with foreign donors and participates in programs where children showcase their talents. She aligns with the notion that the foundation primarily exists for the benefit of beneficiaries. Furthermore, she said, "*For me, I don't mind (receiving their suggestions, opinions, and children taking initiatives) because it is part of empowering them to be self-sustainable and also productive members of society but provided it doesn't run contrary to the mandate of the organization.*" She adds a caveat, "*if they are really young, of course, they'd be purely just recipients. But we can engage more mothers to help out with the child beneficiary. But for those, say, the youth, like the teens, and before they reach 18, if they can get themselves to organize, why not.*"

NGO-2

Sister R, a board trustee who is concurrently the project manager of the Residential Care, highlights that although the girls went through traumatic experiences, they are individuals worthy of respect. She regards the girls as their collaborators. She explains, "*They are really our partners. We do not even call them beneficiaries. Kaya lang hindi naman maintindihan ng iba. Sanay kasi sila na ang tawag beneficiaries* (It is just that - when we address them as partners- the others need help understanding what we mean since they are more used to calling them "beneficiaries"). According to Sister R, treating them as mere followers will not sustain the program, and considering them as passive recipients would hinder

their productivity and resilience. She also views the girls as ambassadors for the foundation.

On the other hand, Mr. S, a long-standing board trustee with a background in business, primarily communicates with program managers rather than directly with the beneficiaries. While he occasionally participates in events like Christmas programs, he perceives that the board delegates the children's education to the nuns and social workers. From his perspective, the children engage in educational activities but do not actively participate in decision-making or provide suggestions for improvement. He sees the children as recipients of the NGO's services rather than contributors to its decision-making processes.

By NGO Management

NGO-1

The Executive Director treats the families, especially the parents, as partners. She also recognizes children as partners who need guidance. Among the other managers, there is a collective perception that children play pivotal roles as active participants. On the side of the Finance Manager and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, the children have roles and responsibilities in the organization, such as attending school, studying, and doing their assignments. If they do not cooperate, they are withdrawn from the program.

Furthermore, the Program Operations Manager believes children should be given a voice. She states, *"We believe that the children have their own needs which they alone can explain. Our being adults does not mean that we already know their needs. There are things that we do not understand, which they need... We need to talk to them so they can verbalize it."*

NGO-2

The two assistant managers perceive the girls as integral partners in the foundation's mission. Sister T views each child as the central figure in her transformation and personal development journey. She emphasizes to them, *"We can only propose. Even if we say it every day, you are still the ones who will decide if you will listen to us and if you will study well and not have yet a boyfriend."*

Sister U underscores that the girls are not passive recipients but active contributors. She clarifies, *"The girls are not just at the level of recipients. They are*

also helping us in our work and our mission".

By Beneficiaries

NGO-1

The parent leaders, often called as *nanays* (mothers), must have at least a child or grandchild enrolled in the Educational Program. They work closely with the social workers to guide children's projects and identify youth leaders. The *nanays* recognize that children in the program have a significant role and responsibility, emphasizing that they are not only there for the benefits. According to *Nanay EL*, the officers and members of the Barangay Children Association are expected to be active in NGO activities, attend regular meetings, and adhere to the Constitutional By-Laws.

Simultaneously, child and youth beneficiaries perceive their active roles in the program. Youth JB underscores their responsibilities, attending meetings and sharing knowledge with their peers. Another Junior Educator shares, *"For me, my role is to be a leader and the voice of fellow members so that they also learn to share whatever they wish to say."* Child ZE believes that a member of NGO-1 symbolizes hope for the community, serving as a leader and a role model. Child RE explains that their role *"...is to really facilitate and lessen the gap between children and adults. Children get to understand things better when children are the ones who explain."* Other Junior Educators in the group confirm the effectiveness of a child-to-child approach.

NGO-2

Within NGO-2, the girls view themselves as an extended family. Child HA expresses this sentiment, saying *"Kung ang turing naming sa kanila Mama, di lahat magkakapatid na din po kami."* (If we treat them -the nuns- as mothers, then we are all sisters). This perspective manifests that they have inculcated the Sister's message of supporting and encouraging one another to do good. Child JL adds that they have to be good companions of one another. She echoes the advice of Sister R that they need to be collaborators.

The girls firmly identify themselves as partners in the operations of the NGO's programs.

With confidence, Child JU declares that they need to contribute and not pass on all the tasks to Sister.

Perceived Stakeholder Classification of Beneficiaries and Levels of Beneficiary Participation

Board of Trustees

NGO-1

In the spirit of true partnership, NGO-1 actively seeks input from its beneficiaries regarding the NGO's services. The Chair underscores, "*If they say the bag is not sturdy, then it is not.*" He elaborates that if the children are dragging the bags, there is undoubtedly reason behind it and the organization must delve into the matter. The Board Chair believes that the beneficiaries, as valued partners, should be integral to the decision-making process. He stresses, "*It is important that they express their ideas and form part of the solution.*" During the challenging times of the pandemic, when the NGO grappled with how to reinforce educational support, the Junior Educators took the initiative to tutor younger children in their neighborhood. The Junior Educators took a proactive approach without waiting for the NGO leaders to guide them.

On the contrary, Mrs. Y is silent about the contributions made by young children during meetings, assemblies, and Tutorial Programs.

NGO-2

Sister R, considering the girls as their partners and ambassadors, reveals that the NGO actively involves them in national fora. Here, the girls discuss children's issues and offer recommendations for child protection. Subsequently, the management seeks the girls' input on how their participation can translate into meaningful actions within the residence, which they eventually carry out. Moreover, Sister R explains that the management entrusts the girls with critical roles, including planning, scriptwriting, and activity evaluation. They encourage the girls to actively contribute to the conceptualization and execution of both inbound and outbound activities. Many times, the management respects and supports the positions and ideas put forth by the girls.

Conversely, Mr. S remains unaware of the significant contributions made by the girls in managing the house and actively participating in the planning and execution of the foundation's programs.

Management

NGO-1

The Executive Director emphasizes that beneficiary participation transcends mere assistance from the NGO. As active officers and association members, the NGO leaders guide the beneficiaries to contemplate their community's needs, identify issues, propose solutions, and take action. She says "*Hindi puedeng walang participation talaga. Di puedeng dinidikta sa kanila. Kundi kasama sila.*" (It is not possible to do without participation. We should not just dictate things to them. Rather, they are part of it.) The managers lead their beneficiaries to manage their programs.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Officer corroborates the Executive Director's claim that the NGO does not simply help the beneficiaries. Rather, the NGO empowers the beneficiaries to help themselves. The NGO management provides capacity-building sessions to equip the youth to participate and represent their sector at various levels.

The Finance Officer affirms that there are various occasions when children and parents are aware of their needs and desires. As a result, the NGO listens to and carefully considers their request.

NGO-2

Because of collaboration, the two assistant managers rely on the girls to assist in the day-to-day operations of the household. Sister T recalls facing initial challenges in building rapport with some girls. However, she was determined to connect with them, recognizing that they were protagonists of their own learning. Sister T would actively engage the girls by inquiring about their preferences for household tasks, such as kitchen work, living room upkeep, or managing waste. Subsequently, the managers attentively listen to the girls' feedback and suggestions. This approach stimulates critical thinking, learning, self-expression, and active participation in various activities.

Sister U, in a similar vein, emphasizes their practice of seeking recommendations and contributions from the girls concerning the foundation's program in different communities.

Beneficiaries

NGO-1

Driven by their self-perception as dynamic leaders and integral members of the NGO, Child RO actively engages with other children who may face barriers to participation and helps them make steps to become more involved. These young leaders also work diligently to foster an environment where all members are encouraged to express their thoughts, narrowing the gap between adults and children.

Child AI, who sees her role as that of a teacher, ensures that her fellow children acquire the essential skills of reading and writing. Moreover, she regularly shares valuable suggestions with the Executive Director, benefitting other children. Recognizing his role as a significant influence and model for the others, Youth JS dedicates himself to his studies as well as trains and leads members of the association.

NGO-2

Embracing their roles as sisters within their community, the older girls take it upon themselves to offer guidance and correction when the younger ones misbehave. As dedicated collaborators working alongside the nuns, the girls maintain a spirit of cooperation and adherence to the house rules. They diligently carry out their assigned tasks to ensure the residence remains clean and well-organized.

In their capacity as partners, the girls actively contribute creative ideas and engage in negotiations with the nuns to plan and execute events and training sessions. They invest their efforts to ensure the success of each event.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses each case and makes a cross-case pattern analysis based on the theme.

Levels of Participation

Regarding the first question, children of NGO-1 participate through *information* and *consultation*, *public involvement*, and *negotiation* and *bargaining*. The association members inform the NGO leaders of their comments on past activities. In parallel, the tutees enrolled in the Tutorial program share information about their needs and capacity by responding to the Needs Assessment Survey, which constitutes a form of *information* and *consultation*.

The Junior Educators teach children so they can catch up on their lessons. Additionally, the officers of the association actively plan, execute, and evaluate projects. In these interventions, beneficiaries contribute their labor and participate through *public involvement*.

Throughout these processes, association officers negotiate their plans with the directors and social workers during workshops and meetings. The members engage in negotiation and bargaining as they express their preferences for activities during Cluster Meetings and the General Assembly. In these various ways, beneficiaries actively participate in decision-making, thereby employing *negotiation* and *bargaining* as vital elements of their involvement.

As regards NGO-2, the girls participate through *information* and *consultation*, *public involvement*, and *negotiation* and *bargaining*. The girls provide information and opinions on their preferred assignments, which the sisters use as a basis to decide on the final assignments. The girls execute in-house events and conduct advocacy training, which reflects *public involvement*. Finally, they negotiate and bargain with the sisters their assignments and suggestions during monthly meetings, their plans for the show, and their designs and suggestions on advocacy training. These manifest their participation through *negotiation* and *bargaining*.

In both cases, the children participate in the three levels of Ebrahim's typology but not the fourth level of taking initiatives independent of the NGO. The latter is understandable since children cannot be totally independent of adults (Aguiling-Pangalangan, 2017; Family Code of the Philippines, 1987). Children need to be accompanied and supported by parents and parental authorities (Family Code of the Philippines, 1987). The beneficiaries contribute ideas and their opinion through information and consultation levels. They are publicly involved in the design and execution of the projects. Finally, the children negotiate and bargain as part of the decision-making process.

Perceived Stakeholder Classification of Beneficiaries

Board of Trustees

In NGO-1, the Chair perceives beneficiaries as partners in program development, aligning with Miles' (2017) concept of collaborators. However, his perspective does not classify the children as claimant

stakeholders as they do not actively pursue claims (Miles, 2017). Simultaneously, he does not perceive the beneficiaries as passive recipients. In contrast, the board Secretary regards young children as pure recipients.

The divergence in perspectives may be attributed to differences in their beliefs, values, and experiences (Bess et al., 2009; Bhatt, 1997; Hehman et al., 2019; Stolier, 2019). The Chair believes in the inherent right of all children to participate, regardless of age, while the Secretary emphasizes the dependence of young children on their mothers. Furthermore, the Chair's frequent interaction with both management and child beneficiaries informs his perception of children as active partners in the foundation's mission.

In NGO-2, Sister R perceives the children as collaborators, while Mr. S perceives them as mere recipients. Sister R believes that children deserve respect as individuals and emphasizes the importance of their opinions and actions. Her belief is rooted in her congregation's values, where participation is a way of life. On the other hand, Mr. S lacks the same formation and does not share Sister R's beliefs. He does not see the need to involve children in project implementation and decision-making.

Management

In NGO-1, the Executive Director views children as partners needing guidance due to their age, while the other members of the management perceive them as participants with responsibilities. They perceive children as collaborators but do not see them as influencers under Miles' (2017) concept.

In NGO-2, the assistant managers highlight the girls' agency but do not classify them as influencers or mere recipients per Miles' (2017) definition. Both assistant managers perceive the children as collaborators.

In both NGOs, the management has a unified perception of their stakeholders as collaborators. Their beliefs and values likely shape their perception. NGO-1 management believes in community organizing strategy. NGO-2 managers receive the same formation in the congregation as Sister R. Furthermore, as suggested by scholars (Molden & Dweck, 2006; Phillips et al., 2014) frequent contact with beneficiaries strengthens management's perception.

This management perspective aligns with the

growing interest on NGO's downward accountability which emphasizes the importance of understanding beneficiaries' interests (Cornwall & Aghajanian, 2017; Wellens & Jegers, 2016) and involving them in evaluation and decision-making (Mooketsane et al., 2018; Wellens & Jegers, 2016).

Beneficiaries

NGO-1 beneficiaries see themselves as participants with responsibilities such as studying diligently and participating in NGO activities. Some perceive themselves as teachers, leaders, and role models, collaborating with the management. The beneficiaries do not perceive themselves as mere recipients.

NGO-2 beneficiaries do not want to depend solely on the nuns. Instead, they contribute to the projects of the foundation. They see themselves as partners and collaborators with the nuns and the organization.

The beneficiaries' self-perception mirrors their management's perspective. This supports Stet and Burke's (2000) assertion that societal attribution of meaning to individuals impacts their self-concept.

Perceived Stakeholder Classification of Beneficiaries and Levels of Beneficiary Participation

The divergence in trustee perspective on beneficiaries does not appear to correlate with the levels of beneficiary participation in both NGO-1 and NGO-2.

On a different note, both NGO-1 and NGO-2 managers share a common perception of children as collaborators. This collective management perspective leads them to actively consult beneficiaries for suggestions, engage them in project implementation, and allow for negotiation of their ideas. Consequently, the management's perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries significantly influences the practice of beneficiary participation. Notably, the manager's perception becomes more robust when they observe beneficiaries collaborating. In this sense, beneficiary participation bolsters the management's perception.

Furthermore, beneficiaries in both NGOs do not perceive themselves as mere recipients, claimants, or influencers as described by Miles (2017). In NGO-1, beneficiaries perceive themselves as participants with responsibilities towards the management

and fellow association members. They contribute suggestions and actively engage in organizational activities, including negotiating their plans with the leaders. In NGO-2, beneficiaries perceive themselves as collaborators, sharing responsibilities with the management and their fellow girls in the residence. They provide input and suggestions, lead project initiatives and negotiate their concerns with the management.

These findings support the claims of scholars (Chu, 2015; Flint & Blyth, 2021) that perceiving beneficiaries as partners or end-users rather than as passive recipients fosters greater participation.

The multiple case study also accentuates the emphasis leaders place on children as human beings with inherent rights. NGO-1's Chairman, NGO-2's trustee/ project manager and assistant managers highlight the principle that each child is an individual with agency and deserving of respect. The articulation of the trustees and managers affirms the idea that one's values, beliefs, and principles shape their perception of others (Bess et al., 2009; Bhatt, 1997).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While Hofstede's (2010) theory suggests that participation is rare in high power distance countries, the multiple case study illuminates the practice of beneficiary participation in two Philippine development NGOs. The Board of Trustees and managers possess considerable power in terms of resource control and social status over beneficiaries. Surprisingly, their interactions do not exhibit condescension. Some trustees and all managers perceive beneficiaries as collaborators, guided by their underlying beliefs and values. The study reveals that the managers' perception influences beneficiary participation. Simultaneously, active participation of beneficiaries can further solidify the managers' perception. On another note, in an environment where beneficiaries consistently experience treatment as partners, they adapt the same perception and engage in collaborative participation with the organization.

The study provides valuable insights for future research beneficiary participation. A comparative analysis could examine how NGO leaders perceived stakeholder classification of beneficiaries affects participation in high and low power distance countries.

In practical terms, this research offers two key recommendations. First, it encourages NGO leaders in high power distance countries to recognize the intrinsic dignity of beneficiaries and view them as fellow human beings. Second, it inspires those in positions of power to acknowledge that beneficiaries can be responsible agents serving as collaborators, partners, ambassadors, or role models. These recommendations can foster a more inclusive and participatory approach in high power distance countries.

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Ethical Declaration

The research followed the guidelines and protocols established by Velez College Ethics Review Committee. The researchers obtained informed consent from all the participants in the study.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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