

Stories of Empowered Dabawenya as Partners of Social Development in Davao Del Norte

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of empowered Dabawenya women and their contributions to society's development in Davao del Norte. Utilizing a multiple case study design using the purposive sampling technique, five empowered Dabawenya women participated in the in-depth interviews (IDI). The collected data were analyzed through thematic and cross-case analysis. The study reveals that these women navigate complex challenges, including balancing family responsibilities and community roles, overcoming organizational and societal barriers, and the need for greater support and resources. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrate strong coping mechanisms such as faith and prayer, social support, resilience, and proactive actions. Their stories shed light on their personal growth, integrity, and community impact while underscoring the value of collaboration and access to education. This study contributes to the discourse on gender and development by highlighting the vital role of empowered women in local progress. It ultimately urges the implementation of inclusive policies and support structures to enhance women's participation in sustainable development.

Keywords: empowered women, Dabawenya, contribution, community development, challenging experiences, multiple case study, qualitative research, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, women have played essential yet often unacknowledged roles in shaping families, communities, and entire societies. Despite significant progress in gender equality, many women around the world continue to face systemic barriers that will limit their empowerment in economic, political, and social spheres. The problem is persistent gender disparities, cultural norms, and institutional biases hindering women's participation and leadership opportunities (Wakdikar & Sharma, 2023). The challenge of women's empowerment remains critical, as empowered women contribute to their well-being and broader societal development and economic growth (Sulat, 2023).

According to Smith (2023), empowerment of women is not only a matter of social justice but also a critical driver of sustainable development and societal well-being. Understanding the factors contributing to or impeding women's empowerment is essential for designing effective policies and interventions that promote gender equality and enable women to realize their full potential. Understanding the determinants,

outcomes, and effective women empowerment interventions is essential in formulating policies that promote sustainable development and social justice (Tamanna & Aarti, 2023).

Kabeer and Huq (2017) define empowerment as the ability of individuals, particularly underprivileged women, to achieve authority, make life decisions, and take action. Usually, the acquired skill changes society's educational, health, and economic aspects. Gender equality is essential for sustainable development, especially in developing nations where women's potential is frequently underestimated or disregarded, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2020).

Studies on international affairs often demonstrate the benefits of women's participation. A 2018 study by Malhotra and Schuler claims that communities are stronger and more stable when women actively participate in household decision-making. Hunt and Samman (2019) assert that women are progressively occupying leadership and corporate roles, improving family well-being and economic prosperity.

In the Philippines, and notably in Davao City, women have long held prominent positions of authority in both official and informal spheres. Embracing multiple vocations—including those of teachers, business owners, community activists, and changemakers—the Dabawenya women are well-known for their strength, intelligence, and leadership. Gonzales and Reyes (2019) claim that women in Davao are the primary drivers of small company expansion and community-based initiatives to connect the region and promote local development. Carollo and Santos (2021) also explore the role of women in peace initiatives in Mindanao, particularly in rebuilding and restoring communities after conflict.

On the local level, Davao was identified as one of the more gender-progressive local levels. According to the Davao City Integrated Gender and Development Division (IGDD, 2022), the involvement of women in the city's livelihood programs, civil society projects, and governance is rapidly increasing. The resolve and resilience of Dabawenya women have initiated this change. According to Lopez (2023), many women in Davao are at the forefront of initiatives in community health, education reform, and sustainable development. Some advocates argue that the Women's Development Code in Davao still does not adequately address the needs of marginalized women.

Condeza (2017) asserts that the IGDD plays a vital role in closing this gap. The IGDD is an organization under the City Mayor's office that organizes training initiatives, seminars, services, and awareness campaigns to uplift the morale of women throughout the city. Most people have utilized their skills to secure temporary or permanent jobs, transforming them into community leaders, business owners, and educators. This study's gap highlighted the need for an in-depth investigation that captures the diverse roles and contributions of an empowered Dabawenya woman, providing a rich understanding of how empowerment manifests in a real-life context and drives sustainable development.

Doing this research provides a timely and significant contribution to current discussions on gender and development, highlighting not only the successes of Dabawenya women but also the continuous need to support and amplify their voices in every sector of society. The research aims to address several key research questions to develop significant content. First, the study seeks to know the challenging experiences of these empowered Dabawenya women as they contribute to society's development. Second, it examines how these empowered Dabawenya women cope with their challenges. Lastly, what are their learnings and insights as empowered Dabawenya women as they contribute to this society's development? A qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of empowerment's complex and contextual nature. The study captures the subjective meanings, social interactions, and power relations that shape women's empowerment through the in-depth interview. This approach also centers women's voices by providing a platform for marginalized perspectives and fostering a holistic

understanding of empowerment.

This study draws primarily from feminist theory, a framework that extends beyond women's issues to examine broader structures of power, inequality, and transformation. At its core, feminism is an intellectual lens and a political movement grounded in the pursuit of justice, equity, and social change. As Ferguson (2017) describes, feminist theory challenges rigid dualities and embraces more fluid, intersectional ways of understanding human experiences. It emphasizes the need to see people, especially women, as shaped by overlapping systems of identity, power, and resistance.

Central to this perspective is the concept of empowerment. Feminist social work, for instance, sees empowerment as a goal and a process of challenging subordination and enabling individuals, especially women, to assert agency in their lives (Soni, 2021). Turner and Maschi (2015) argue that blending feminist and empowerment-based approaches can support social justice and uphold human rights. However, real-world implementation remains difficult, especially for women in underprivileged sectors where barriers to empowerment persist despite policy efforts (Baidya, 2024).

Empowerment, by its nature, is multifaceted. Its meaning can shift depending on cultural, economic, and political contexts. Dejene (2007, as cited in Alkire et al., 2013) presents empowerment as both a process and an outcome at individual and collective levels involving training, consciousness-raising, participation, and education. Through these avenues, people gain the capacity to make informed decisions and improve their quality of life.

Globally, women's empowerment is now widely acknowledged as a pillar of sustainable development. Akhter and Cheng (2020) emphasize that achieving gender equity is vital for women's well-being and broader social and economic stability. According to Dar (2020), women play diverse roles in society, encompassing those within families, institutions, and public life. The intersection of these social positions shapes a woman's entire status.

Empowerment is crucial for creating inclusive and democratic societies, claims Kazembe (2020). This method highlights the intricate link between behaviour, knowledge, and social interactions and their impact on women's rights and opportunities. Jupps et al. (2010), cited in Kostenko, Kuzmichev, and Ponarin (2015), assert that empowerment is rarely easy. Historical occurrences, cultural norms, and local realities heavily influence it. It is also nonlinear. It acknowledges small successes and values adjustments, even when they deviate from a predetermined course of action.

Women's social empowerment is vital to community life. Mobility, family autonomy, inheritance rights, decision-making independence, and physical and mental health are all included. Since the home is the primary setting for teaching and upholding gender norms, it is crucial to the fight against injustice and the advancement of women's independence.

Social constructivism enhances feminist theory by offering perspectives on gender-related issues. Social interactions, cultural narratives, and institutional practices shape the evolution of gender roles, norms, and opportunities over time. Women's business endeavours and economic progress are closely intertwined, claims Amin (2017). Scholars such as Salama et al. (2021) and Lombardo and Kantola (2021) investigate the establishment and opposition to gender norms and realities that affect women's education and empowerment, including early marriage and poverty. These instances underscore the importance of approaching gender issues from a social constructivist perspective, particularly when addressing barriers to equality.

The captivating narratives of women who have overcome challenges serve to achieve the objective of this research, which is to foster inspiration and empowerment. Women can transform imagination into action;

these drawings can stimulate creativity, boost self-confidence, and motivate action. This research complements educators by revealing the impact of positive female role models on personal development and self-empowerment while also helping them to comprehend personal growth as a holistic process in empowerment.

Furthermore, this understanding can help to improve discussions and leadership strategies in gender-sensitive pedagogy. To achieve SDG No. 5 Gender Equality, this study inspires and empowers. The study is also insightful in enabling educators to adopt gender-sensitive teaching strategies to advance social justice by providing equal educational opportunities for all genders.

For students, seeing strong, independent women serve as role models in their communities and in textbooks may greatly inspire and enlighten them. This study may help showcase the transformative potentials of women's involvement for schools and institutions, serving as a tool to create programs that foster similar growth in students and community members.

This establishes an essential and practical foundation for upcoming investigations. It offers helpful guidance to those studying the multifaceted functions of women in development and other fields, and it adds to the emerging literature on gender, empowerment, and growth. This research seeks to document the experiences of these women and analyze the factors that enable or restrict their empowerment, advancing the notion of inclusion, representation, and equity, which has far-ranging implications beyond Davao del Norte.

Finally, this study seeks to capture and document the experiences of Dabawenya women who work to shape the continuing development of their society. It seeks to understand personal experiences in conjunction with the societal factors that shape the notion of empowerment in reality and how it is exercised in real-life situations. Understanding these facets regarding women goes beyond mere recognition of their contributions; it analyzes the social, cultural, and economic factors that turn on or off their participation in building a better Davao del Norte.

METHOD

Study Participants

The participants of the study were empowered Dabawenya women from the Province of Davao del Norte. The selection of five (5) participants was carried out through purposive sampling, an approach to non-probability sampling where the researcher purposely selects participants who meet specific criteria and are anticipated to contribute meaningfully to the study. The aim of this study is to seek a sufficient balance between the ample number of cases needed for robust conclusions and practical constraints for detailed and thorough analysis. The purposive selection of participants allowed the study to explore qualitatively the processes of women's empowerment and the contributions and challenges of women leaders in Davao del Norte.

In selecting participants, the following criteria were used: (1) the ages ranges between 40-75 years old; (2) must be a resident or living between Davao del Norte; (3) must be a biological woman, noting that the discussion on LGBTQIA+ empowerment and rights is a separate and a rich topic in itself to explore; (4) must be an empowered woman who could be leader in a cultural, socioeconomic, or political context, a career woman, businesswoman, and education or religious leader whose life and works meaningfully influences the province of Davao del Norte; (5) must have a unique challenging case that contribute to her empowerment; and (6) her advocacy/leadership must not be in less than five (5) years. Thus, as for the exclusion of the study, those who permanently reside outside Davao del Norte, have less than five (5)

years involvement in advocacy or leadership and those have not yet engaged in such situations as well as to those individuals in earlier years of study. These participants were selected to provide rich and varied perspectives on empowerment shaped by their distinct roles and experiences within Davao del Norte social and institutional landscape. Their diverse backgrounds allow exploration of empowerment across different sectors from governance and health to education and law enforcement.

Informed consent was directly provided to participants to ensure they were fully aware that their participation in this study was voluntary. Additionally, participants who felt uncomfortable responding to interview questions had the option to remain silent. Those who chose to withdraw their informed consent at any point during the study were immediately excluded, respecting their autonomy and right to discontinue participation at any time. Each participant was assigned a code name based on their case unit number and position. Their sequence within the case units was represented using pseudonyms such as PO1, PO2, PO3, PO4, and PO5. Each case was documented in terms of participant's background, years of service, and contributions to development.

Materials and Instruments

To conduct this study, the researcher created the interview guide questionnaires consisting of open-ended questions that will encourage participants to share their experiences, challenges, and roles in community development. The researcher provided open-ended questions during the interview to create a meaningful and interactive interview experience. This approach aims to understand the challenging experiences, coping mechanisms, and learning and insights of these empowered Dabawenya women. The collected data served as a factual basis for analyzing and drawing conclusions aligned with the research objectives. Furthermore, the interview guide questionnaires of this research instrument feature three (3) research questions with probing questions for gathering raw data from the participants. The same open-ended questions were asked during the individual in-depth interview (IDI) to avoid one-word responses, allowing the participants to provide qualitative responses and fostering rich qualitative data. On the other hand, the information obtained from the participants was encrypted to protect the information disclosed by the participants.

Design and Procedure

To effectively achieve this study's goal, qualitative research was employed to document the lives and contributions of selected empowered Dabawenya women, particularly by exploring their challenging lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights that contribute to societal development. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized that qualitative research offers a distinct approach to empirical inquiry. Additionally, Creswell (2017) provided a structured example of how a case study is typically conducted, referencing his 1995 collaboration with Asmussen. He highlighted that Lincoln and Guba's case study framework, which includes the problem, context, key issues, and insights gained, remains a fundamental aspect of the design. However, Creswell and Asmussen introduced a more personalized perspective by detailing the extent of their data collection and essential questions posed.

This study followed Creswell's recommended approach by carefully examining the case, clearly defining its objectives (outlined in the introduction), utilizing extensive data sources (detailed in the data collecting section), and implementing a rigorous step-by-step data analysis process (described in the data analysis section). Subsequently, the researcher sent personalized invitations to potential participants, outlining the purpose of the study, the expected time commitment, and the interview format. The selection process carefully considered both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Following the approval of the letter granting permission from the University of Mindanao Professional

Schools for the researcher to proceed with the study, all requirements were fulfilled. This included subjecting the research protocol to an ethics review in compliance with the highest ethical standards set by the Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) of the University of Mindanao Ethics Board. A panel consisting of four (4) professional internal validators and one (1) professional external validator reviewed and approved the semi-structured in-depth interview (IDI) protocols. After a thorough evaluation, the validated interview guide questions were assessed, reviewed, and signed by the professional validators to ensure the feasibility and reliability of the expected outcomes. Once the validation process was completed, approval was granted to commence data collection.

Before conducting the interview, the researcher ensure the following: (1) Obtain an approval from the participant or participant's organization, (2) protected the privacy of the respondents, (3) discussed the topic, survey content, and the purpose to ensure understanding, (4) distributed an interview consent form, and (5) informed the respondents that data collection might involve video and audio recordings. The researcher obtained the respondents' consent and provided an overview of the study before conducting the interviews to gather essential data. Additionally, the participants of this study were recruited through direct invitation. Potential participants' profiles were reviewed online, and contacted via direct messages to seek their consent and willingness to participate. After securing their approval and determining their preferred time and interview format, the researcher met with the participant for a follow-up orientation regarding their rights and the research participants.

In the beginning of the interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form and obtained permission to proceed with the interview and observation. Participants signed the informed consent, confirming their agreement to the objective use of data in the study. The researcher then conducted in-depth interviews while strictly adhering to ethical considerations. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The transcriptions were presented to the participants, allowing them to add or remove any information they deemed relevant or unnecessary to the study. The interview sheet served as a guide in structuring the questions. After the interview, participants were allowed to select their pseudonyms.

In this study, the five purposively selected participants' cases are individually discussed and analyzed in a later chapter, allowing for the development of generalizable conclusions that may apply to similar cases. This justifies the use of a multiple case analysis. Yin (2017) provides a straightforward explanation of a multiple case study, stating that it follows a multiple case study design when research involves more than one case. The primary advantage of this approach is that it produces more compelling evidence, which generally leads to a more robust analysis and discussions (Herriot & Firestone, 1983, as cited by Yin, 2017). The cross-case analysis further strengthens the study's robust narrative by examining not just one but multiple cases of empowered women in distinct fields. This approach moves beyond the limitations of an isolated case critique, offering a broader perspective by comparing and analyzing various cases. However, a key drawback of this design is that it requires significantly more time and resources than a single-case study (Yin, 2017).

Moreover, the researcher took multiple roles, including interviewer, transcriber, translator, and data analyst. Several data collection procedures were undertaken to ensure a thorough investigation. In selecting resources, the researcher personally identified participants with unique cases that met the inclusion criteria relevant to the study. Formal request letters were also sent to the Dean of the University of Mindanao Professional Schools and to the selected empowered women invited as research participants. Upon receiving their consent and signed approval, the researcher provided an orientation and coordinated with the participants to determine their interview availability.

The researcher conducted on-site and online interviews via Google Meet at a time most convenient for the participants, using the approved and validated interview guide questions. During the interviews, the researcher ensured that participants were fully informed about the use of the audio recording device. Participants were also oriented on the three central questions of the study and given ample opportunity to reflect on their thoughts and sentiments. They were encouraged to respond in the language they were most comfortable using. Throughout the process, interview protocols and ethical considerations were strictly observed.

After the interview, the researcher transcribed the recorded discussions and thoroughly reviewed the transcriptions and notes taken. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes and central responses. These findings were interpreted and discussed in relation to relevant literature to provide a comprehensive analysis. Additionally, the researcher carefully proofread and edited the study to ensure clarity, accuracy, and linguistic correctness while maintaining the authenticity of the participants' real-life experiences. To uphold accuracy and ethical integrity, the researcher consulted the participants to verify whether the transcribed text accurately reflected their thoughts and ideas. This process allowed them to review, add, or remove any information they considered relevant or unnecessary to the study.

Moreover, the data from transcription and translation were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as Boyatzis (1998) described, involves encoding qualitative information into codes, words, or phrases that serve as labels for different data segments. Following the steps suggested in Colaizzi's strategy for data analysis, I familiarized the data obtained from the interviews and then, I extracted the significant statements from the transcripts that answered the research questions. Next, the meanings from each significant statement were formulated and grouped into cluster themes. This enabled the researcher to identify the emerging themes.

A cross-case analysis was also conducted by comparing and contrasting the instances after a within-case analysis in which each case was examined independently (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study's main purpose was to discover themes and patterns in the occurrences and their differences and similarities. The results show that empowered women in Davao del Norte face several challenges, including balancing family, community, and occupational responsibilities, structural barriers, the search for support, and the need to develop effective coping strategies. This strategy emphasizes spirituality, community, personal growth, understanding of development, and seeking help from others. Within the parameters of the cross-case study, the experiences, viewpoints, changes in attitude, and effectiveness of the empowered women in Davao del Norte were also investigated.

To ensure the study's validity, the researcher selected participants according to the inclusion criteria and requested honest and truthful responses to the research questions. The data were collected in accordance with all pertinent legal requirements to ensure reliability. Komolthiti (2016) asserts that triangulation of the collected data improved the dependability and confirmability of the findings (Shenton, 2004). The study's findings were presented transparently to enhance transferability, emphasizing their relevance in similar contexts and highlighting the need for further research.

To uphold ethical standards, the researcher adhered to the guidelines set by the University of Mindanao Ethics and Review Committee and was granted UMERC Protocol No. UMERC-2024-410. This protocol ensures respect for individuals and the confidentiality of participants' information. The researcher also expresses gratitude for the participants' time, effort, and honest responses to the research questions. Furthermore, the study will be presented to the participants to acknowledge their contributions and inform

them of the research outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data herein presents a summary of the study objectives' results. The presentations of the results were organized and followed the of research questions about the challenging experiences, coping mechanisms and the learning and insights of the empowered Dabawenya woman.

Case Units

Case 1. Monica is a retired professional with extensive experience in cooperative leadership and human resources management. She spent thirty-four (34) years as a department head of human resources in the Province of Davao del Norte, where she helped shape policies and grow the staff. Aside from her contribution to the government agency, she was a great cooperative leader for more than thirty (30) years at one of the largest cooperatives in Tagum City. She holds a leadership position like Chairperson and Vice Chairperson on the Board of Directors. She was an accredited trainer of the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) who conducted leadership training and seminars to support women's empowerment.

She has consistently advocated transparency in the system and ethical leadership in her professional life. She has encountered challenges, including dishonesty and corruption. Her unwavering commitment to integrity often finds herself in challenging situations that require her to demonstrate responsibility, resilience, and determination in upholding ethical standards. Through her leadership, she creates significant impact on community development and fosters economic growth.

Despite all the challenges, she has faced them all fiercely and dominantly. She emphasizes the importance of support systems for women that will protect and strengthens public service and community development. As long as real service is available to all people, she will always stand up for her leadership, ethics and financial independence.

Case 2. Mara was the Chairperson of Barangay Health Workers (BHW) in the local area of Tagum City for twenty-six (26) years. She demonstrated her strong advocacy for improving the community healthcare system. Her leadership extends beyond the barangay, as she was the President of the Barangay Health Worker (BHW) Federation, promoting the well-being and growth of health volunteers throughout the entire city. In addition to her health services, she served as the president of the Tagum City Single Ladies Organization. She promotes strength and togetherness among women who have suffered similar circumstances. Her passion, dedication, and expertise have earned her numerous awards, such as "The Most Outstanding Woman Leader in the Field of Health" by Tagum City Council of Women Foundation, Inc. (TCCWFI) and Davao del Norte Province Council of Women (DNPCW).

Mara balances her challenges with the strict standards of community health work. She has seen the struggles of vulnerable families without access to medical treatment, older adults without sufficient health care and young children suffering from unavoidable diseases. Sometimes, she handles multiple tasks, given the limitations of staff and tools. She manages her various obligations, including her leadership responsibilities and personal issues. As a widowed mother, she has skillfully navigated emotional, physical, and financial problems, ensuring her children received a first-rate education and embarked on a successful career.

Despite the challenges that she has faced, she remains committed to addressing the needs of the community. She genuinely set aside her time, space, and energy to meet other people in need, especially in medical assistance, and remained committed to assisting them. Her commitment to service showcases

her strength, compassion, and excellence. Truly, she exemplifies perseverance and positivity in the face of adversity.

Case 3. Teresa is a Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. She was a retired and respected figure in the Philippine Red Cross Davao del Norte Chapter as she served in twenty-seven (27) years and eight (8) months and became the Chapter Administrator. She was also in the International Committee of the Red Cross for six (6) years. Over those years in service, she has played a pivotal role in disaster response, community health programs, and emergency relief operations. She continues to use her wealth of experience to inspire and mentor other humanitarian workers.

As the Philippine Red Cross Davao del Norte Chapter Administrator, she ensured that medical aid and resources reached communities. Despite the immense physical, social, and emotional responsibilities, she remained committed to balancing her time with family. She proves that dedication and service do not mean sacrificing personal relationships, for they bring positivity and significant contribution to anyone in need.

Throughout her career and services, she has faced multiple community attitudes that must be bridged to address unstable attitudes while advocating for health and humanitarian aid. She understands the urgent need for coordination and rapid mobilization of resources in times of crisis. She advocates strong collaboration among local government units, private organizations, and humanitarian agencies. Her life story is a testament to unwavering service, resilience, and the power of compassion in transforming the lives and communities into a better place.

Case 4. Iris is a distinguished educator and leader, balancing her professional ambition with personal life while shaping the future of education. She has served twenty (20) years of service in the Department of Education as a dedicated school principal for seven (7) years before stepping into her current role as a Public Schools District Supervisor in the Division of Panabo City. She honed her expertise to uplift literacy and learning in her community and is passionate about literacy program innovations. One of her most outstanding initiatives is the BASAKleta (bicycle with books), which was developed as a learning community plan amid COVID-19. The BASAKleta aims to continue the learning and development of the children in reading despite the school disruptions. This project embodies her commitment to equity in accessibility, equity, and lifelong learning, which have earned her prestigious recognition in the City of Panabo as a “Women of the Year-Change Catalyst Award” and “AGILA (Achievement of the Great Instructional Leadership Award).” Her recognition is a testament to her transformative impact on the field of education.

Despite her achievements, she faced many challenges from negative and unsupportive peers who doubted or resisted her innovative ideas. As she takes on those challenges, she remains resilient and chooses to lead as an example and let herself speak for herself. Instead of being discouraged, she uses these experiences to fuel her passion for advocacy, mentorship, and collaboration.

She continues to inspire students, teachers, and fellow women leaders as an education catalyst. She proves that education is not about teaching but transforming lives and communities through innovation, leadership, and advocacy. She remains committed to her mission to bridge the educational gap, promote gender inclusivity, and foster a culture of continuous learning. Through collaboration, mentorship, and progressive policies, she ensures that education is not only accessible but also empowers other people to reach their full potential. Her unwavering commitment shapes a future where quality and transformative education uplift individuals and the entire generation.

Case 5. Cory is a retired policewoman with thirty-two (32) years of service and left an incredible remark

on security and advocacy for women's and children's rights. She dedicates her life to protecting the vulnerable and empowering future generations. Her exceptional service earned her multiple national awards as a "Best Cop" in year 2001 for her excellence in law enforcement, "Top Policewomen" in year 2004 in recognition for her leadership and contributions as a female officer and the "Best Philippine National Policewomen and Children Protection Desk Award" for her tireless efforts in protecting the women and children from abuse and violence. She extended her career in law enforcement to continue her advocacy as the President of Mindanao Soroptimist International of the Americas Philippines Region in the year 2022-2024. This organization uplifts and empowers other women and girls through education, mentorship, and community programs.

In her many successes, she faced significant challenges in her missions. This includes the high emotional toll of working with vulnerable people that tested her resilience, where she witnessed countless cases of abuse, neglect, and violence. She also encountered legal and bureaucratic systems that often delay justice for women and children in need. These experiences strengthened her to push for systemic reforms, stronger legal protections, and more efficient processes to support survivors.

Even in retirement, she remains a beacon of hope and strength. She tirelessly still advocates for programs that equip other women with the confidence, skills, and opportunities. Her journey is a testament to service, courage, and unyielding dedication to justice and empowerment. She proves that true leadership extends far beyond in how many years in service it is a lifelong commitment to make the world a better and safer place for all.

Challenging experiences of the empowered Dabawenya women as they contribute to society's development

Table 1 presents the emerging themes of the challenging experiences of the empowered Dabawenya women as they contribute to society's development. Participants' sentiments were carefully examined and categorized, which came up with three emerging themes: (1) Balancing Family and Work/Community Roles, (2) Organizational and Societal Barriers, and (3) Need for Support and Resources to Empower Women.

Table 1. Experiences of Empowered Dabawenya Women as They Contribute to Society's Development

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Balancing Family and Work/Community Roles	Balancing multiple roles as a leader, employee, and mother
	Overcoming personal hurdles to fulfill community obligations
	Ensuring time for family amidst heavy social responsibilities
	Reconciling professional ambition with personal life
	High emotional toll of work with vulnerable populations
Organizational and Societal Barriers	Confronting corruption and dishonesty in leadership
	Facing immediate work demands from superiors with minimal discrimination
	Dealing with diverse community attitudes
	Overcoming negative or unsupportive peers

	Struggling within legal/bureaucratic systems to protect women and children with complex, drawn-out cases such as abuses
Need for Support and Resources to Empower Women	Need for Financial and legal support
	Need for Local government encouragement
	Need for better coordination and quick resources during crises
	Need women helping women through training and networks
	Need for continuing education and outreach for women/girls

Balancing Family and Work/Community Roles. Balancing family, work and community roles involves effectively managing time, setting priorities and maintaining clear communication to fulfill responsibilities while ensuring personal well-being and strong relationships. Balancing family responsibilities with professional or community roles is a significant challenge for empowered women (Laurenzi et al. 2021). Many women assume multiple roles as mothers, leaders, professionals and community workers, requiring exceptional dedication and time management.

Despite progressive gender policies, traditional norms still influence women's societal roles. Research by Santos (2021) found that Dabawenya women often face pressure to prioritize family obligations over professional aspirations. The study highlights that while women are encouraged to be economically active, they are still expected to fulfill domestic duties. Additionally, a study by Mendoza (2022) on women in Davao's rural communities revealed that cultural expectations discourage them from pursuing non-traditional roles, reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Managing leadership positions while raising a family presents a significant challenge for many women. Work and community engagement demands often coincide with family responsibilities, which require careful planning and perseverance. One participant shared the difficulty of managing leadership responsibilities while caring for young children.

"At the same time, I have children na infant pa... it was so challenging on my part being a coop leader... At the same time, I have a family to take care of." (P01_CQ1.1)

At the same time, I had children who were still infants... it was so challenging on my part being a co-op leader... At the same time, I have a family to take care of.

Some women take on even more extensive responsibilities, serving multiple community roles while fulfilling their duties as mothers and primary caregivers. Their ability to support their families while engaging in social and professional commitments shows their resilience and adaptability.

"Una nako ma'am... as mother nga a widow, naka pahuman ko sa akoang anak... proud kaayo ko. Dayon... as a barangay worker... usa pud ko ka purok leader." (P02_CQ1.1)

First of all, ma'am... as a mother who is a widow, I was able to help my child finish their studies... I'm very proud. Also... as a barangay worker... I'm also a purok leader...

Ensuring a balance between family and professional life requires a lot of effort. Women in leadership roles recognize the importance of dedicating time to both aspects of their lives to maintain stability and fulfillment. The participants emphasize the importance of time management and setting priorities navigating these dual commitments.

I would categorize [challenges] into two: family/personal and professional life... It's hard to balance work and family life... The greatest challenge is how you manage your time properly... (P04_CQ1.1)

Balancing professional responsibilities with personal life is never easy, especially when the work deeply involves a painful situation. Take for example, P05_CQ1's story, she shared the heartbreaking experience

of handling a child rape case while on duty. Moments like these don't just weigh on the mind; they settle heavily on the heart, making finding peace outside of work even harder. This emotional burden is a powerful reminder of how closely intertwined our professional roles are with our well-being.

Juggling the demands of work, family, and community isn't just about managing time it's about navigating a complex web of emotions, expectations, and responsibilities that shape who we are and how we feel. It's a delicate dance that profoundly affects our overall quality of life.

Finding balance requires more than willpower; it means recognizing the importance of personal needs and social connections and leaning on support systems when things get tough (Annik, 2017). Despite the challenges, many women show incredible strength and resilience. They adapt, grow, and thrive at home and in their careers. Their stories remind us that about self-care, community support and smart time management aren't luxuries, they're essential tools for surviving and flourishing in the complex journey of modern womanhood.

Organizational and Societal Barriers. Studies have continually pointed out the obstacles hindering women's progress to leadership roles within organizations. These barriers include socio-cultural, organizational, governmental, and psychological factors (Kapoor et al., 2021). Women who take on leadership roles and advocacy often face organizational and societal barriers that test their resilience, determination, and ability to create change.

Empowered women in Davao City, Philippines, play a crucial role in societal development, yet they face various challenges that hinder their full participation. A study by Alamon (2019) on Davao's local governance found that while Dabawenya women hold key positions (e.g., Mayor Sara Duterte), they still face scrutiny regarding their leadership styles compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, research by Torregosa (2021) emphasizes that women in leadership roles experience higher expectations and are often judged based on societal stereotypes rather than their competencies.

Despite increased representation in mid-management, executive roles remain male-dominated because of hidden obstacles and systemic gender inequality (Gunn 2021). These barriers can stem from corruption, gender biases, bureaucratic challenges, community resistance, and the burden of advocating social justice. As P01_CQ1.2 recounted, one significant barrier women face is corruption and dishonesty within institutions. Advocating transparency and justice requires bold decision-making and a willingness to take risks. Women who challenge corrupt systems often face resistance but remain committed to ethical leadership.

Community resistance further compounded the difficulties women faced in their leadership roles. P02_CQ1.2 and P03_CQ1.2 experienced misconceptions, opposition to change, and a lack of stakeholder cooperation, requiring effective communication and collaboration with local authorities.

"In the community, lain-lain man gud ang tao... some are pilosopo... you have to explain everything... Challenge kayo na, oy... we have to coordinate with the mayor... the CDRMO... so daghan jud problema..." (P03_CQ1.2)

In the community, people are different... Some are difficult and argumentative... You have to explain everything... That's really a challenge... We have to coordinate with the mayor... the CDRMO... so there are really a lot of problems.

However, these challenges do not deter women from having meaningful consequences. Many leaders use education and advocacy as tools to break down barriers, empower others, and create social change opportunities.

Some teachers are negative, some are positive... I was able to make them understand that this [Basakleta

reading] is an investment for them... We ended up helping six teachers get promoted and become outstanding teachers. P04_CQ1.2

In the broader societal context, women also take responsibility for addressing pressing social issues, such as violence against women and children. Their advocacy work contributes to justice and protection of vulnerable individuals.

“Daghan jud ta ug rape case and abuse... battered women... gusto lang jud nako matabangan sila... gusto lang jud nako ma-control... naa jud ko adbokasiya... napa-priso namo ang nanghilabot...” (P05_CQ1.2) There are so many cases of rape and abuse... battered women... I just really want to help them... I just want to take control... I have an advocacy... We were able to imprison those responsible.

These organizational and societal barriers empowered women to continue to push forward, proving that leadership is not defined by gender, but by determination and courage (Bartlett, 2024). They can overcome obstacles and drive positive changes within their organizations and communities. Their perseverance enables them to create meaningful change, proving that empowerment is not just about individual success, but also about transforming the systems around them.

Need for Support and Resources to Empower Women. Despite progressive gender policies, traditional norms still influence women's societal roles. Research by Santos (2021) found that Dabawenya women often face pressure to prioritize family obligations over professional aspirations. The study highlights that while women are encouraged to be economically active, they are still expected to fulfill domestic duties. Economic empowerment remains a significant challenge for Dabawenya women, particularly in male-dominated industries. A report by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA, 2022) indicates that women in Davao's workforce encounter wage gaps and limited access to high-ranking corporate positions. A study by dela Cruz (2020) on women entrepreneurs in Davao revealed that while microenterprises led by women thrive, they struggle with financial literacy and access to capital.

Additionally, a study by Mendoza (2022) on women in Davao's rural communities revealed that cultural expectations discourage them from pursuing non-traditional roles, reinforcing gender stereotypes. However, empowerment is not automatic, it requires deliberate efforts to create an environment in which women can explore alternatives, cultivate transformative consciousness, and seize opportunities for progress.

We were charged 150,000 each... we had to spend our own money, not the Tagum Cooperative money... we have to appear in court, spend our time... that was a great challenge... (P01_CQ1.3)

The power of relational support is evident in P02_CQ1.3's experience, where encouragement from the Barangay Council enabled her to persevere despite societal challenges. This underscores the crucial role of community endorsements in bolstering women's resilience.

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women by fostering their understanding of their conditions and societal expectations. It involves overcoming barriers, improving skills, and increasing access to resources (Dandona, 2015).

We need more trainings... a stronger support group for women, helping women organizations... by giving them more opportunities to succeed... to give birth to more innovations for greater transformation in society. (P04_CQ1.3)

“Kanang kuan jud... continue education kay kung dili ka mag-apil-apil... seminars... Tappok sa mga kababainhan... among gina tabangan... Naa mi medical outreach... pang women and girls lang jud na.” (P05_CQ1.3)

You know... continuing education is important because if you don't participate... in seminars...

gatherings for women... we help them... We have medical outreach... exclusively for women and girls. Women face significant hurdles from financial burdens and legal challenges to community resistance and relentless demand for efficient service delivery. However, their resilience is fueled by encouragement, community backing, and a deep-seated desire for societal transformation. The path to genuine women's empowerment requires a holistic and relational approach that integrates support systems, resources, and opportunities to dismantle systemic barriers.

As Haoucha (2024) emphasized, the journey toward true women's empowerment is multifaceted, demanding more than just individual advancement. Empowerment, therefore, is not a solitary endeavor but a collective responsibility, requiring a commitment to create conditions that nurture women's transformative consciousness and enable them to realize their full potential.

Coping mechanisms of Empowered Dabawenya in contributing to society's development

Table 2 presents the coping mechanisms of Empowered Dabawenya in contributing to society's development. Participants' sentiments were carefully examined and categorized, which came up with four emerging themes: (1) Faith and Prayer, (2) Social Support, (3) Resilience and (4) Proactive strategies.

Table 2. Coping Mechanisms of Empowered Dabawenya as they contribute to Society's Development

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Faith and Prayer	Relying on prayer and trust in God for emotional strength and perseverance.
	Seeing God as a partner in adversity and a source of hope
	Attributing success and resilience to divine guidance.
Social Support	Drawing strength from loved ones, colleagues, and community networks
	Relying on teamwork, open communication, and moral support to share burdens
	Gaining emotional reassurance and practical help from these networks
Resilience	Cultivating self-confidence, risk-taking, and perseverance to confront and manage obstacles
	Staying positive, flexible, and adapt to changing demands
	Using personal inspiration (e.g., children, goals) to remain motivated and strong
Proactive Strategies	Employing systematic planning and effective time management
	Emphasizing open communication, consultation, and thorough preparation for decisions
	Continually learning from experiences, laws, and professional resources to solve problems effectively

Faith and Prayer. Faith and prayer are potent sources of empowerment for women, offering a bedrock of strength and resilience in the face of life trials. For many, deep-seated faith provides an unwavering sense of purpose, shaping their identity, and guiding their moral compass, particularly in leadership roles (Umer, 2024).

Many Dabawenya women draw strength from deep religious convictions. Imam and Fernandez's (2022) study on interfaith coping mechanisms found that both Christian and Muslim women utilize prayer as a primary stress management tool, particularly when facing discrimination or overwhelming responsibilities. Faith-based advocacy often drives social change, inspiring women to challenge injustice and work toward a more equitable world. In cultures where faith is central, it empowers women to transcend limitations using their beliefs as a tool for personal and societal transformation.

"I am a person man gud who is so dependent on the power of the Lord... Prayer is really my only coping mechanism." (P01_CQ2.1)

I am a person who is so dependent on the power of the Lord... Prayer is really my only coping mechanism. Participants also emphasized the calming and supportive nature of faith, showing that prayer not only provides emotional comfort, but also fosters a deep sense of security and connection to a higher power.

"Mo calm down jud ka with the help of GOD Lord... kay ug di jud ka mangayo ug tabang sa Ginoo lisod oy." (P03_CQ2.1)

You will truly calm down with the help of God... because if you don't ask for His help, it will be difficult. These perspectives indicate that faith and prayer play a significant role in empowering women, particularly in coping with health challenges and providing social support. Faith (Iman) is seen as an essential tool for women's empowerment, elevating them above life's problems through belief in Allah (Abdul Razak, 2023). Additionally, Ugochi (2024) stated that prayer and spirituality connect women to family, faith communities, and others, offering comfort, strength, and hope. Ultimately, faith and prayer provide a powerful, personal pathway to empowerment, enabling women to navigate challenges, find purpose and meaningfully contribute to their communities.

Social Support. Social support plays a vital role in empowering women by providing emotional, psychological, and practical assistance to overcome challenges. Robust community networks serve as critical buffers against workplace and domestic stressors. Research by Mendoza (2023) demonstrated that Davao's women entrepreneurs rely heavily on bayanihan (collective effort) systems, with 65% participating in rotating credit associations (paluwagan) to overcome financial constraints.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD, 2023) also documented how single mothers in Davao form neighborhood childcare cooperatives to share parenting duties while pursuing livelihoods. These informal yet structured support systems mitigate isolation and resource limitations.

Strong support systems whether from family, friends, mentors, or communities help women build confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging (Beals, 2021). These networks not only offer encouragement but also enable women to navigate societal barriers, pursue leadership roles and advocate for meaningful change.

Women draw significant strength from their families, colleagues and support networks, which helps them navigate challenges and maintain resilience. These relationships offer emotional, practical and psychological support, ensuring that individuals do not face difficulties alone.

"My husband was really my best support... also my boss, my mother, mentors... Wala jud ko nag-hide kay basin mabuang ko, so I share to them the problem I'm facing." (P01_CQ2.2)

My husband was really my greatest support... also my boss, my mother, and my mentors... I never kept things to myself because I might go crazy, so I share with them the problems I'm facing.

Support networks play a vital role in empowering women by providing emotional and practical assistance. These networks provide emotional reassurance, practical help, and access to information, contributing to women's overall well-being (Espinoza & Linares, 2020).

Family, friends and community connections serve as anchors during difficult times, offering encouragement and tangible help that enable women to persevere in their roles and responsibilities.

Family and friends... they will keep you grounded... they are my core and source of strength. (P04_CQ2.2)

Supportive relationships encourage women to persevere through adversity, assume leadership roles, and actively contribute to their communities. As Fayn et al. (2024) stated, empowerment is not a solitary journey; it is strengthened by collective support and shared resilience. By fostering strong support systems, society can create an environment where women are not just empowered individually but also uplifted around them, paving the way for broader social transformation.

Resilience. Resilience can be viewed as both a trait and a process, with individuals demonstrating the capacity to "spring back" from challenging situations (Resnick, 2018). The defining characteristic of empowered women is that they navigate challenges and push them forward despite adversity. Their ability to take risks, remain flexible, and maintain their self-confidence plays a crucial role in overcoming obstacles.

Observing the strength of women leaders overcoming and emerging from various difficulties is always amazing. An example is the study done by Torregosa (2023) on women barangay leaders, which examined how they developed "crisis resilience". These women leaders did not merely survive difficult periods; they learned to grapple with substantial challenges, turning them into opportunities for growth and emerging stronger. Often, they employed clever mental strategies, such as positive thinking, and used humor to dismiss unfair gender-based criticism.

This commitment is also evident in the workplace. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) (2022) published an astonishing statistic that 82% of professional women from Davao practiced mindfulness techniques to manage stress. Mindfulness techniques enhance their well-being, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to society.

Achieving personal development and assuming a leadership role frequently entails risk, stepping away from the familiar, and venturing into uncharted territory, as explained by Heifetz and Linsky (2017). Adapting with change and being willing to embrace challenges—such as the ones presented in the modern-day world—can encourage women to be bold in tackling problems. Resilience is not just the ability to weather adversities; it is also associated with other attributes such as compassion and emotional intelligence. Clearly et al. (2018) argue that these are particularly useful in enabling women leaders to cope with their own challenges and the larger enduring burden of serving their communities.

"Risk-taking is one of the best strategy... self-confidence... We tried to be strong... We tried to be flexible pud kay kung dili pud mi maging flexible, unsaon man na?" (P01_CQ2.3)

Risk-taking is one of the best strategy... having self-confidence... We tried to be strong... We tried to be flexible too, because if we weren't flexible, how would we manage?

Empowered women are deeply rooted in their abilities to stay positive, remain flexible, and adapt to ever-changing circumstances. Maintaining a positive mindset allows them to manage their stress and challenges without being overwhelmed. Flexibility and self-awareness also play crucial roles in navigating adversity (Negi, 2024). Understanding one's purpose and vulnerabilities is essential for growth and success.

"Dili jud ko magpaapekto sa negative... kailangan taas ug pasensya... mo relax lang mo kadali no... mo calm down.." (P03_CQ2.3)

I really don't let myself be affected by negativity... you need a lot of patience... just relax for a moment... calm down.

Despite facing challenges, such as intimate partner violence, systemic discrimination and cultural

constraints, many women demonstrate remarkable resilience. Resilience among empowered women is a combination of adaptability, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and strong personal motivation (Vejdani et al. 2024). These qualities enable them to persevere in the face of challenges, demonstrating that true empowerment is not just about success, but also about the ability to rise above difficulties and continue making an impact.

Proactive strategies. Proactive strategies are planned, and intentional actions are taken to anticipate challenges, prevent problems, and create opportunities for success. It is essential to empower individuals, help them control their circumstances, overcome challenges, and achieve personal and professional growth. Proactive strategies enable individuals to move beyond limitations, take initiative in their personal and professional lives, and create lasting positive changes in their communities (DiBella et al., 2023).

Beyond personal coping methods, systemic approaches are increasingly employed. The City Women's Council (2023) institutionalized gender-responsive budgeting, allocating funds for women's crisis centers and legal aid—a direct result of women leaders' advocacy. Academic studies by Cabrera (2023) also identified "preventive resilience" tactics, where women's groups conduct regular policy dialogues with local governments to preempt discriminatory practices. Such forward-looking measures transform individual coping into collective structural change.

Engaging in thorough preparation and strategic planning is essential to ensure success in leadership and advocacy. Key strategies include prioritization, delegation, planning, and goal setting. These methods can enhance efficiency, work-life balance, and job satisfaction, while poor time management may lead to stress and reduced productivity (Qtait, 2023). Women who take on these responsibilities emphasize the importance of organizations, legal awareness, and teamwork in overcoming obstacles. Time management and structured approaches are key factors in creating efficiency and maximizing the impact.

“We do calendar of activities, we do evaluation... we ask them what they need... time management. Nakita nato nga makatabang ta sa ilang pamilya.” (P05_CQ2.4)

We do a calendar of activities, we do evaluations... we ask them what they need... time management. We see that we're able to help their families.

Developing organized systems, conducting evaluations, and maintaining open communication with the community helps ensure that initiatives are effective and sustainable. Open communication is the cornerstone of effective leadership and empowerment, allowing women to foster trust, transparency, and collaboration in their personal and professional lives (Thelma & Chitondo, 2024).

“Kailangan jud nimo i-collaborate with the community... be sensitive to their needs... open communication is needed... di ka magpa-apekto sa stress.” (P03_CQ2.4)

You really need to collaborate with the community... be sensitive to their needs... open communication is needed... don't let stress affect you.

A proactive mindset involves continuous learning and adaptability. Leaders who embrace personal development, leverage others' strengths, and engage in volunteerism, demonstrate resilience and effectiveness in their roles. Participants' willingness like P04 to take on various tasks demonstrates a proactive approach to learning, which fosters personal and professional growth.

By adopting a proactive mindset, women in leadership positions strengthen their abilities to navigate obstacles, create meaningful changes, and empower others. Through preparation, adaptability, and strategic action, they can overcome systemic barriers and contribute to the improvement of their community.

Learning and Insights of an Empowered Dabawenya woman as they contribute to this society's development

Table 3 presents the emerging themes of the learning and insights of an empowered Dabawenya woman as they contribute to this society's development. Participants' sentiments were carefully examined and categorized, which came up with three emerging themes: (1) Strengthening Personal Growth, (2) Upholding Integrity and Responsibility, (3) Creating Community Impact and (4) Sustaining Collaboration and Education.

Table 3. Learnings and Insights of Empowered Dabawenya Women as They Contribute to Society's Development

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Strengthening Personal Growth	Overcoming personal limitations and fears
	Gaining confidence, boldness, and resilience
	Embracing continuous self-improvement and adaptability
Upholding Integrity and Responsibility	Emphasizing honesty and transparency in leadership
	Practicing ethical decision-making for the greater good
	Demonstrating accountability to community and organization
Creating Community Impact	Understanding local needs and addressing them through hands-on initiatives
	Sharing resources, best practices, and support to uplift others
	Fostering meaningful change via collaboration and outreach
Sustaining Collaboration and Education	Highlighting education as key to women's empowerment
	Building supportive networks and training for skill enhancement
	Encouraging open dialogue to inspire and influence others

Strengthening Personal Growth. Overcoming personal limitations and fear is a crucial step toward self-empowerment and growth. Empowered Dabawenya women consistently emphasize the importance of continuous self-development. These insights emphasize that personal growth is not merely about acquiring new skills but about breaking internal and external barriers. Facing crises and pushing past self-imposed limits enables individuals to cultivate courage, independence and a proactive approach to life challenges (Palmer, 2024).

The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW, 2023) reported that participants in their leadership training programs showed 65% greater confidence in taking on community roles after completing personal development courses. Furthermore, Torres' (2023) research highlighted how mentorship relationships between established and emerging women leaders create valuable learning ecosystems that foster both professional and personal growth.

I became a strong person when I faced those crises... I learned a lot... (P01_CQ3.1)

Building confidence, boldness and resilience is a significant aspect of personal growth. These attributes allow individuals to navigate life uncertainties in terms of their strength and adaptability. By embracing these attributes, individuals enhance their ability to face difficulties with courage and determination, ultimately leading to greater personal and professional fulfillment.

We need to have our own personal growth... I have my growth plan in a week... so that all the plans will be successful and your personal mental health will be in good shape. (P04_CQ3.1)

Continuous self-improvement and adaptability are essential for personal growth and long-term success. Adaptability ensures that people can effectively navigate changing circumstances, making them more

resilient in both personal and professional settings (Moşteanu, 2024). The statement of P05_CQ3.1 underscores how personal development not only fosters self-improvement but also strengthens the capacity to support and uplift others.

By overcoming limitations, fostering confidence and embracing adaptability, individuals can enhance their ability to navigate life challenges and achieve both personal and professional fulfillment. Empowered women not only enhance their well-being and success, but also serve as role models, inspiring others to pursue growth and self-improvement.

Upholding Integrity and Responsibility. Ethical leadership emerges as a cornerstone of Dabawenya women's contributions. Integrity and responsibility are fundamental principles shaping ethical leadership, personal development and community engagement (Tammeleht et al. 2022). These values not only contribute to personal fulfillment but also play a crucial role in improving the quality of work and relationships within the community.

Furthermore, these attributes are instrumental in empowering women, enabling them to lead, serve and create positive changes in their respective fields. A case study by Mendoza (2022) on women entrepreneurs revealed that 85% consider ethical business practices non-negotiable, even when facing competitive pressures. This commitment to integrity extends to family roles as well, with Santos' (2023) research showing how working mothers consciously model responsible behavior for their children while managing professional obligations.

Integrity is the foundation for effective leadership and community engagement. Ethical decision-making maintains trust, efficiency, and sustainable growth within organizations and communities (Ahmed, 2023). Women leaders who prioritize integrity set an example for others and contribute to creating a culture of accountability and fairness.

Dishonesty really would affect the operations... I always inculcate they have to perform their roles effectively. (P01_CQ3.2)

Upholding integrity and responsibility are essential in both personal and professional spheres. Women's empowerment, as seen in the narratives, further reinforces the transformative impact of integrity and responsibility in building stronger and more inclusive communities (Aziz & Anjum, 2024). As women continue to uphold integrity and responsibility, they strengthen their capacity to lead, influence, and inspire future generations toward a more equitable and just world.

Creating Community Impact. The transformative effect of women's leadership on local communities is well-documented. Contributions made by individuals and organizations play a crucial role in improving society. This involves understanding local needs, implementing initiatives that address these challenges, and fostering positive changes through collaboration and outreach. Empowered women who engage in community-driven efforts not only uplift others but also serve as role models for future generations (McCall, 2024).

Dela Cruz's (2023) analysis of women-led barangay projects demonstrated 30% higher implementation success rates compared to male-led initiatives. Notably, Alamon's (2023) study found that women's approach to community development tends to be more inclusive, often incorporating marginalized voices in decision-making processes.

“During our health caravan, libre namo tanan... community welcome kaayo... mo ana dayon...” (P03_CQ3.3)

During our health caravan, everything we provided was free... the community was very welcoming... they immediately responded.

Going down to the ground roots on the literacy needs... to produce functionally literate Filipinos... that's the most important. (P04_CQ3.3)

"Bisan tuod sa ginagmay, nakatabang ka sa uban... nag need jud sila ug livelihood... so we gave them training... dako siyag impact." (P05_CQ3.3)

Even in small ways, you are able to help others... they really need livelihood support... so we gave them training... it has a huge impact.

Empowered women play a crucial role in strengthening communities through their compassion, collaboration, and resilience. By continuing to support and recognize their contributions, society can further advance gender equality and community development, ensuring that women remain catalysts for positive change.

Sustaining Collaboration and Education. Continuous learning and partnership-building characterize the long-term strategies of Dabawenya change-makers. Collaboration and education are fundamental pillars for fostering sustainable community development and women's empowerment. Through continuous learning and knowledge sharing, individuals and organizations can drive meaningful societal changes. Women who actively engage in collaborative efforts and lifelong education not only enhance their skills but also contribute to the empowerment of others, creating ripple effects in their communities (Robinson-Pant, 2014).

Research by the Mindanao State University (2023) highlighted the growing network of women's learning circles that share best practices across different sectors. Particularly noteworthy is the finding by Cabrera (2023) that 92% of women leaders consider peer education crucial for sustaining their impact, leading to the establishment of regular knowledge-sharing forums.

Work without expecting anything in return... share your knowledge... never be selfish. (P01_CQ3.4)
Education is crucial for women empowerment... We can do it even without men... no discrimination. (P03_CQ3.4)

"Makabati ka sa mga speaker... gusto nako professional doctor kay mental health... gusto nako mas ma-learn unsaon pag tabang." (P05_CQ3.4)

You get to listen to the speakers... I want to be a professional doctor because of mental health... I want to learn more about how to help.

Sustaining collaboration and education are crucial for women's empowerment and community transformation (Chikwe et al., 2024). By fostering an environment that values education and collective growth, women become instrumental in driving progress, breaking barriers, and inspiring future generations to pursue empowerment through learning and collaboration. Through these efforts, communities have become more inclusive, informed, and capable of addressing contemporary challenges with unity and purpose.

Cross-Case Analysis

This section presents a comparative summary of the participants' responses, highlighting common themes, differences, and shared experiences. It aims to provide a broader understanding of how empowered Dabawenya women face challenges, cope, and reflect on their roles in society.

Similarities and differences that explain each case

Table 4. Similarities and Differences between Cases

	Case Unit	Remarks
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Themes on Experiences, Coping Mechanisms, and Learnings and Insights of Empowered Dabawenya Woman as they contribute to Society's Development	Similar	Different	
Experiences:			
Balancing Family and Work/Community Roles	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they juggle multiple roles, overcome hurdles, protect family time, reconcile career with home, and endure an emotional toll serving vulnerable groups.
Organizational and Societal Barriers	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they confront corruption, handle heavy demands, navigate diverse attitudes, overcome negative peers, and battle complex legal systems to protect women and children.
Need for Support and Resources to Empower Women	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they need financial/legal backing, local government support, swift crisis coordination, women-led training networks, and ongoing education for girls.
Coping Mechanisms:			
Faith and Prayer	A, C, D, E	B	Cases A, C, D, and E mentioned that they rely on prayer, see God as an ally in adversity, and credit divine guidance for success.
Innovation through Technology	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they draw strength from loved ones, share burdens through teamwork and open communication, and gain emotional and practical help.
Community Engagement	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they cultivate self-confidence, risk-taking, perseverance, flexibility

			under changing demands, and personal inspirations.
Social Support	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they employ systematic planning and time management, emphasize open communication and thorough preparation, and continuously learn from experiences.
Learning and Insights:			
Strengthening Personal Growth	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they overcome limitations, gain resilience, and continually adapt to grow.
Upholding Integrity and Responsibility	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they champion honesty, ethical leadership, and accountability for the greater good.
Creating Community Impact	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they address local needs, share resources, and foster meaningful change in the community.
Sustaining Collaboration and Education	A, B, C, D, E		All Cases mentioned that they emphasize education, build supportive networks, and inspire others through open dialogue.

A notable similarity across the cases is the effort to manage competing responsibilities alongside personal self-care and interpersonal connections. Each participant described challenges with integrating work and family roles. This struggle is associated with an emotional, physical, and psychosocial burden. One consistent theme from the participants is the need for effective time management. Numerous women bear the weight of leadership positions while actively managing their households, demonstrating extraordinary strength. Some participants reflected on the emotional impacts of the intertwining home-work dynamics, especially around complex problems in their professional domains.

In every instance, women suffered from systemic obstacles when attempting to advance in their professions and advocacy. These comprise corruption, bias, and bureaucratic obstacles. Each woman detailed facing institutional dishonesty and fighting for equity and equality in their professions. All the participants underscored the need for pro bono assistance to build up their leadership and advocacy efforts. The all participants mentioned the absence of appropriate funding and legal assistance from relevant local agencies, as well as education aimed at women and girls. One of the participants emphasized the need for holistic sustainable empowerment that encompasses multi-faceted approaches including mentorship, professional training, and legal advocacy. Even with these commonalities, individual priorities within this theme were divergent. While some participants focused attention on the grants, others emphasized urgent response actions for long-term educational initiatives for girls. Such divergence captures the varying

professional and advocacy fields in which they are situated and their perspectives on what aid is most critical.

For many women undergoing trying times, prayer can serve as an important source of emotional and psychological support, providing them with faith that some benevolent power can help them with their problems. A similarity among Cases A, C, D, and E is their strong dependence on prayer to cope with adverse circumstances. These women appeal to religion for emotional and psychological support believing that some higher power indeed helps them with their struggles in life. Faith is not merely an act of believing for these women; it is a practice that gives them soothing reassurance during distressing situations. Case B stands out as the exception. Different from the rest of the cases, Case B did not emphasize prayer as one of the main sources of strength, which indicates a possible lack of correspondence between coping strategies and belief systems. Unlike the other cases that emphasized reliance on some higher power, Case B might process empowerment in other forms such as personal resilience, social support, or through self-help actions.

In the midst of challenges, they emerge as empowered women who leverage technology as a tool for transformation. Regardless of their unique challenges and backgrounds, each of them has found fortitude in their loved ones, has shared burdens through collaboration, and has communicated their way through hurdles. Resilience has been transformed into a virtual reality—whether through collaboration, knowledge, or voice amplification—thanks to technology.

For these women, community engagement transforms from a participation to an empowering process of uncovering who they really are and what they can become. As previously discussed, empowered individuals tackle challenges head on and are able, as a result of having undergone the challenges, to cultivate self-confidence and embrace risk-taking while persisting even when faced with significant adversity. Through active involvement in their communities, they learned how to be graciously flexible, having to change while enduring.

To them, social support is not merely receiving assistance; it encompasses fostering a system of collective trust and communal development. Empowered individuals appreciate that ample determination is required toward forging relationships, cohesive, and efficient communication and self-development. They advance through both successes and failures, acknowledging the lessons each experience offers. Through social support, they establish networks of trust, adaptability, and resilience, transmuting obstacles into pathways for personal, communal, and collective empowerment.

For each individual, personal development is not merely an objective; it is an evolving process of self-evaluation, consistent effort, and metamorphosis. While the individuals encounter different challenges, they possess the capability to transcend constraints, gain fortitude, and adapt toward growth in a universal manner. Through personal reflection, they are willing to apply immense focus and will to face new challenges, overcoming what once appeared impossible. A gentle push beyond self-imposed shackles, seizing opportunities that lie in wait. Through personal reflection, they seek to embrace new chances, defy expectations, and emerge victorious.

Integrity and accountability are the foundational components of leadership and personal ideals, respectively. They appreciate that real empowerment comes from true personal achievement as well as a commitment to ethical stewardship and accountability beyond oneself. Each of them leads, for instance, practicing what they preach. They fortify their character while upholding ethical standards and building a more just society. The determination to do what is right, irrespective of the odds, provides profound inspiration for the next generations.

The final objective was to identify the various different communities. Success, from this perspective, means satisfying the requirements within the community and leaving a positive mark, rather than focusing on personal achievements. They transform communities and people and build healthier communities by aiding change on different levels which in turn, through collective action, motivates change. Each person works differently; by taking action, they provide immediate and sustainable change which builds a culture of compassion, commitment, and collective responsibility for the long term. This proves that these people, under a common vision, can make resilient communities for many generations to come.

Collaboration and education are the two guiding principles which inform the lasting progress of their work. They foster supportive networks and share information to empower people to help themselves or others to become leaders. Knowledge as an education can also be a means for social change. Their initiative provides environments in which learning is achievable, cooperation abounds, and people are encouraged to surpass personal boundaries. Due to their educational devotion and teamwork, the impact of their work is sustainable, not just for a moment in time.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

This section highlights the important findings of the research and analyzes their greater significance. Their focus is on the role of Dabawenya women and the effects of their experiences on development. Some recommendations are made as well. Lastly, the researcher gave personal insights along with remarks which he, indeed, concluded the study with.

Implications for Practice

The documentation of the lives and contributions of empowered Dabawenya women serves as an important educational tool that challenges inclusivity and feminism, social awareness, and active citizenship. The difficult realities of empowered Dabawenya women illuminate the persistent gaps in support systems that accommodate the need for integration of leadership, family, and community roles. Their accounts show how the emotional toll of multidimensional burdens and temporal restrictions, faced either singularly or together, undermines one's ability to meaningfully participate in the private and public domains.

Community and educational institutions ought to integrate programs that are responsive to the real-life struggles of gender inequity. Women are able to manage numerous roles without feeling burnt out through the help of workshops focused on work-life balance, mental health, and emotional resilience. Moreover, women facing organizational challenges such as discrimination, corruption, and resistance from peers are empowered through leadership and advocacy training.

The information further indicates a significant deficiency concerning structural support, particularly gaps in legal aid, funding, and services that respond to crises. It calls for collaboration between academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and local authorities to streamline access to these resources as well as to implement "women-helping-women" models, including mentorship, peer networks, and lifelong learning. Through these initiatives, institutions would actively work toward cultivating an environment that empowers women to take on more prominent roles as leaders, caregivers, and transformative changers of society.

Implication for Future Researchers

Future research should explore the experiences of empowered women across different cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic contexts to better understand the evolving challenges and long-term impacts of empowerment. Specifically, studies can assess the effectiveness of support systems—such as

mentorship programs, legal aid, and community networks—in strengthening women’s resilience and leadership capacity.

Analysts chronicling the experiences of Dabawenya women may explore the influences of individual, social, and cultural dimensions on their lives. Broader cross-sectional participation from other areas—or longitudinal studies with the same participants—may reveal trends and transformations in empowerment over time. Moreover, the impact of male allies and inclusive leadership in fostering the reduction of gender inequities also requires attention from scholars. Research in this domain may aid in designing more tailored and enduring strategies that enable women to actively participate in all areas. The insights gathered from the experiences of Dabawenya women can fuel deeper lines of research. Focused multidisciplinary research building on this foundation can meaningfully advance gender equity and inclusive development.

Implication for All Gender

The results of empowered Dabawenya women indicate crucial insights for inclusive and equitable development. It is evident that women actively participate in various fields, including leadership and community work. However, systemic obstacles such as gender discrimination, resource monopolization, and socio-cultural norms still hinder progress. One important observation is that these difficulties impact the construction of all-inclusive societies; therefore, cross-gender cooperation is essential.

By confronting stereotypes, equitably redistributing household and caregiving duties, and championing inclusive policies at work and in governance, men can actively work towards resolving these inequalities. The cases also illustrate women's empowerment strategies, particularly the faith-based resilience and community networking alongside technological adaptation, demonstrate transferable models for all, irrespective of gender, who encounter systematic obstacles. Importantly, the heterogeneity of coping strategies, the majority relying on spiritual faith and one case using secular approaches, underscores the necessity for polyphonic aid frameworks that are premised on divergent resilience paradigms.

These specific findings illustrate that sustainable development cannot be accomplished through the singular efforts of women. The well-documented difficulties associated with the juggling of roles due to institutional obstacles highlight deep-rooted inequities regarding the opportunity and responsibility allocation across genders. The accumulation of meaningful change as suggested necessitates the collaborative and coordinated approach towards shifting entrenched paradigms that presently hinder the universal participation of all human beings, irrespective of gender identity.

This change relies on men engaging as active supporters of gender justice, women continuing to claim their leadership roles, and gender-diverse individuals expanding the inclusivity of these efforts. The cases provide both a warning and an opportunity—collaborative innovative restructuring of the systems can enable new possibilities for development, but the current dynamics in gender relations are stifling the potential of society. These findings should be furthered by developing alliances across genders along the lines of the systemic obstacles and reinforcing the impact of the strategies these women have crafted.

Concluding Remarks

This research showcases the extraordinary adaptability of Dabawenya women as they perform the multifaceted roles of caregivers and community leaders. Amidst gender discrimination, red tape, and inadequate institutional backing, these women have managed to create coping mechanisms through community collaborations, technology, and faith-based networks.

Their experiences yield three prominent insights. Firstly, the juggling of roles speaks to high levels of adaptability even in the face of systemic constraints. Secondly, their localized approaches to self-empowerment stem from agile response to patriarchal challenges. Thirdly, the omnipresent demand for

outside supplemental systems signals a shortfall within current institutional arrangements. These findings carry important implications. Practically, they call for gender-sensitive workplace policies, enhanced government support programs, and community-based mentorship initiatives. Theoretically, they contribute to feminist development discourse by showcasing how grassroots empowerment can transform systemic limitations.

To support and further enhance these women empowerment, systems-based collaboration is needed. The government must provide proper childcare services and leadership programs, and community-based women's cooperatives alongside mentorship networks should be reinforced. Private sector along with educational institutions need to adopt gender sensitive policies while workplace equity and supportive business frameworks are needed from the former. These findings create a challenge and at the same time, an opportunity for men and male allies to recognize the stultifying impact of patriarchal structures on societal progress and take initiative in removing these barriers. Participation from men includes advocating for gender equality in governmental and workplace policies, equal sharing of domestic duties, mentoring aspiring female leaders, and rejecting sexist standards in everyday social interactions.

In the long term, empowering Dabawenya women is not solely about equality of the sexes; it is an investment towards the sustainable development of the community as a whole. Their accomplishments are well documented and in addition to inspiring many, they present a case for more holistic and systematic support. The women of Davao Exhibit1 demonstrate unequivocally that when women are empowered, communities prosper. From overcoming adversity to embracing change, their journey charts an inclusive developmental paradigm – a partnership between men and women working together towards dismantling an unequal social structure. This transcends women's empowerment; it is a transformation for the benefit of all.

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