

Successes and Struggles: Evaluating the Effectiveness and Challenges of Project Libongkid's Family Centered Reintegration for NPA Remnants in Talaingod, Davao del Norte

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Abstract. This paper studies Project Libongkid, a reintegration program of the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army that draws on the rich culture of the Talaingod Manobo – especially kinship ties and respect for elders – to encourage remaining NPA members hiding in the hinterlands of Talaingod, Davao del Norte, to surrender. For over fifty years, the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA) has used Indigenous marginalization and poverty to continue its armed struggle. Despite government efforts to suppress the insurgency, the NPA still recruits from vulnerable Indigenous communities. Using quantitative data from 170 respondents – including 80 former rebels, 80 of their families, and 10 community leaders – this study assesses the effectiveness of Project Libongkid in promoting peaceful surrender and reintegration. Statistical analysis used frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize data. Chi-square tests were used to assess relationships between categorical variables and project effectiveness, Spearman's Rho was used to determine correlations for ordinal variables, and ANOVA was used to examine differences in problem seriousness across respondent groups. The project was rated highly effective in reducing recruitment, reuniting families, and building trust between marginalized communities and the government. Its success was rooted in strengthening family ties, respecting local culture, and providing support for livelihoods. However, challenges such as threats from active NPA members and limited resources persisted, with women facing greater risks related to safety and stigma. Additionally, the study found that former rebels and their families rated the program more positively than community leaders, indicating that direct experience had a significant influence on perceptions of effectiveness. Respondents from low-income households also found the project more beneficial due to its livelihood support and family reunification efforts. These results underscore the importance of inclusive, community-based peace efforts, particularly among Indigenous groups.

Keywords: CPP-NPA; Family support; Indigenous people; Project libongkid; Reintegration

1.0 Introduction

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA), have been waging war against the government of the Philippines for almost six decades to overthrow the present form of government and drive away the foreign influence in the country, specifically the United States. To achieve this, the CPP-NPA exploited systemic problems induced by poverty, land disputes, and the marginalization of

economically deprived individuals to gain the sympathy of the masses to support and/or join their armed struggle, especially the Indigenous peoples who were neglected by basic services such as education and healthcare. However, despite all the revolutionary ideology, several activities of the CPP-NPA, such as extortion, ambushes, and assassinations, have become unequivocally criminal, resulting in the loss of the lives of civilians. (Guadalquiver, 2021; Jopson, 2025; Pulta, 2024). Despite the positive results of government efforts such as the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) that significantly weakened the NPA in their operational activities in the country, some of its remaining members in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, were still active and trying to bring back the glory of being renowned as a recruitment ground for the NPA's Southern Mindanao Committee. (Palicte, 2023).

The local indigenous Manobo communities in Talaingod have also been targets of the CPP-NPA for a long time. (Abangan, 2023; NCIP, 2021). These ancestral communities are geographically isolated, which renders them difficult to access basic services and modern information, thereby contributing to the vulnerability and exposure to societal difficulties. Although intel security operations proved effective, resulting in the dismantling of two NPA guerrilla fronts, which significantly weakened the rebel presence in Talaingod, some of the NPA remnants chose not to surrender and decided to live in the wilderness of the Pantaron Mountain Range, the boundary of provinces of Davao del Norte and Bukidnon. (Mendoza, 2022). These NPA remnants were vulnerable to being consolidated by CPP cadres to form another NPA guerrilla unit to conduct atrocities and thereby bring fear and terror to the local populace. To address this, the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army, deployed in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, had conceptualized Project Libongkid. This culturally sensitive reintegration initiative used family and kinship links to persuade NPA remnants to surrender. This approach is grounded in the recognition that familial authority and the wisdom of tribal elders are essential and significantly influence decision-making in Manobo culture. (Ibanez, 2023; Pearlhill, 2021). In contrast to invasive conventional tactics like combat operations and service of warrants of arrest, the project emphasized community-based dialogue as a means to neutralize threats and break cycles of violence.

From the 1st week of March 2025 to the 1st week of May 2025, troops of the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army under the leadership of LTC ALIB B SUMANGIL, the Commanding Officer, implemented Project Libongkid with a series of community-focused actions in the municipality of Talaingod, which aimed to facilitate the successful surrender of remaining NPA remnants. The troops conducted 55 pulong-pulong, or reconciliation dialogues, with the identified family members of NPA remnants while providing them with financial aid and food packs worth Php80,000 to support the negotiation. Additionally, they have organized three (3) community discussions facilitated by *datus*. Moreover, a total of 25 agricultural tools have been distributed under the project to support the families of these NPA remnants, along with 500 seedlings of fruit-bearing trees and 50 sacks of yellow corn. As a result of these interventions, around 89 NPA remnants with 19 firearms and other materiel of war surrendered on May 28, 2025, and were formally received by Edwin I. Jubajib, the Provincial Governor of Davao del Norte. (Anaten, 2025).

The empirical evidence from this mass surrender supports the finding that peace-building interventions that include family participation and local leaders' involvement are effective in reintegrating insurgents in conflict-affected areas. (Suarez & Baines, 202; Emmanuel, 2025). However, studies on insurgency resolution within Indigenous contexts in the Philippines have typically focused on militarized solutions and relatively little on family-centered interventions. (Cariño, 2022). Despite national programs like the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) and Balik Loob Program, most have not considered the cultural dimensions of surrender efforts, particularly in remote Indigenous communities like those in the municipality of Talaingod. (Alcantara et al., 2023). This gap makes it necessary to assess programs like Project Libongkid that combine modern peace-building with traditional family structures and indigenous authority systems.

Therefore, this study assessed that gap by evaluating the efficacy of Project Libongkid as a localized counterinsurgency model that utilizes modern peacebuilding strategies and traditional kinship systems, as well as indigenous authority structures of the Manobo tribes. It analyzes explicitly how family, culture, and humanitarian assistance influenced the NPA remnants in Talaingod to surrender. The findings aim to inform peacebuilding efforts, both within policy and practice on the part of all actors working in conflict resolution and Indigenous community development in the Philippines by documenting these successes and challenges.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, as supported by Cresswell (2023), who described variables and relationships within this approach. This research was suitable because it aimed to evaluate the impact of Project Libongkid on NPA surrender and reintegration, and to identify any links between the program's actions and the outcomes of reintegration. The design was compatible with study objectives and allowed description and correlation analysis without manipulating variables.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling and selected 170 key informants who were directly involved in the implementation of Project Libongkid in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. The respondents were composed of three groups: 80 former NPA rebels who were reintegrated, 80 immediate family members of surrendered NPA remnants, and 10 tribal leaders (*datus*) who assisted in community reconciliation. The sampling approach prioritized depth of experience over random representation, as the study aimed to understand the intervention mechanisms of Project Libongkid.

2.3 Research Instrument

This study employed a researcher-developed, bilingual questionnaire (English/Cebuano) to measure the effectiveness of Project Libongkid and the challenges faced by the NPA remnants during its implementation. It instrument has three parts: Part 1 is a 6-item demographic profile (group affiliation, age, gender, marital status, education, and income); Part 2 is a 10-item 5-point Likert scale (1 = negative to 5 = positive) for the program effectiveness assessment; and Part 3 is a 10-item 5-point Likert scale used to measure the challenges faced by former rebels during the implementation of the project. To ensure validity, the questionnaire underwent face and content validation by five experts, and revisions were made accordingly based on their feedback. The bilingual designs helped respondents understand the clarity and accessibility of the survey.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Following instrument validation, data collection began with formal approvals from the Municipal Tribal Office (for cultural compliance) and Barangay Chairmen (for site access). Researchers administered paper-based surveys with consent forms that reflected the study's research problem. As a linguistic intervention, Manobo dialect interpreters assisted those less literate in Cebuano and Visayan in maintaining response accuracy while respecting the preferences of indigenous languages.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed SPSS for statistical analysis, utilizing different methods for each research component. Respondent demographics were characterized by descriptive statistics (frequency/percentage). The average weighted mean (AWM) was used to assess the effectiveness of the program and the severity of the problems, using a 5-point scale from Sozen & Guven (2024). Additionally, we calculated the variation in responses. Relationships of profile variables to effectiveness ratings were tested with chi-square tests (categorical variables) and Spearman's rho (ordinal variables). ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived problem severity among the respondent groups, with all tests at a significance level of 0.05.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical protocols and anonymized participants using alphanumeric coding. Participants had the explicit right to decline questions or withdraw without any consequence, ensuring voluntary participation. Additionally, procedures that respect cultural differences have been developed in collaboration with Manobo tribal elders from the Municipal Tribal Office and the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) to honor the traditions of the Talaingod Manobos and adhere to international research ethics, thereby valuing the cultural identity of the people being studied.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Profile of Respondents

In terms of Community Leaders

As shown in Table 1, the study examined the insights of ten community leaders, or *datus*, which comprises 5.88% of participants who participated in Project Libongkid. Firstly, in terms of gender composition, all identified leaders

were male, which is consistent with traditional indigenous gender norms. In terms of age distribution, the majority, 70%, were 56 or older, and 30% fell into the 36 to 55 years old age range, a significant factor in the cultural value placed on elder leadership and wisdom. Additionally, marital status data revealed that 90% of community leaders were married, indicating that they had established family roles and reflecting the importance of being stable and responsible to their clans and families. However, regarding educational attainment, the results showed significant disparities: half of the tribal datus had no formal education, 40% had completed elementary education, and only 10% had completed high school. This suggests a widespread lack of education in the municipality, as even tribal datus lack access to basic services (Beltran, 2024). Finally, the majority of leaders reported monthly incomes ranging from Php5,001 to Php10,000, which highlights that even respected community figures also struggle financially.

Table 1. *Profile of Community Leaders*

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Age	18-25	0	0.00%
	26-35	0	0.00%
	36-45	1	10.00%
	46-55	2	20.00%
	56 and above	7	70.00%
Gender	Male	10	100.00%
	Female	0	0.00%
Marital Status	Single	1	10.00%
	Married	9	90.00%
	Widowed	0	0.00%
	Separated	0	0.00%
Educational Attainment	No formal education	5	50.00%
	Elementary level	4	40.00%
	High school level	1	10.00%
Average Family Income	Below P5,000	1	10.00%
	P5,001 to P10,000	8	80.00%
	P10,001 to P15,001	1	10.00%
	P15,001 to P20,000	0	0.00%
	P20,000	0	0.00%

In Terms of Surrendered NPA Remnants

Table 2. *Profile of Surrendered NPA Remnants*

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Age	18-25	26	32.50%
	26-35	33	41.25%
	36-45	14	17.50%
	46-55	5	6.25%
	56 and above	2	2.50%
Gender	Male	61	76.25%
	Female	19	23.75%
Marital Status	Single	7	8.75%
	Married	72	90.00%
	Widowed	1	1.25%
	Separated	0	0.00%
Educational Attainment	No formal education	52	65.00%
	Elementary level	24	30.00%
	High school level	4	5.00%
Average Family Income	Below P5,000	79	98.75%
	P5,001 to P10,000	1	1.25%
	P10,001 to P15,001	0	0.00%
	P15,001 to P20,000	0	0.00%
	P20,000	0	0.00%

The surrendered NPA remnants comprised 47.06% of the total figure of respondents, and demographic data showed key recruitment vulnerabilities in Table 2. A substantial majority, or 76.25%, of those aged 18 to 35 years old were young adults – another indication that CPP-NPA was targeting youth. The gender distribution indicated a male dominance of 76.25%, while a significant female minority, comprising 23.75%, was frequently involved in roles related to logistics, education, and agitation-propaganda. Regarding family status, almost all were married, suggesting household economic pressures may have influenced initial recruitment into the armed group.

Particularly troubling was the education gap—65% had no formal schooling, and only 5% graduated from high school—a severe case of educational deprivation. Economically, almost all (98.75%) lived on less than Php5,000 monthly, which constituted extreme poverty and made them targets for the NPA’s promises of livelihood support if they joined or supported the armed group. Together, these patterns depict a picture of largely uneducated, economically disadvantaged young adults whom the NPA prioritized recruiting (International Crisis Group, 2024).

In Terms of Immediate Family Members

The family members of surrendered NPA remnants constituted 47.06% of the study participants (80 people), as shown in Table 3. The surveyed family members were mostly young adults aged 18-35 (75%), which suggests that conflict has a direct impact on younger family members. Also, the study affected more men (61.25%), while 38.75% were women. The gender distribution indicated a male predominance, with 61.25% of the surveyed family members being men, while women constituted 38.75%. Similar to other respondent groups, the family members of NPA remnants reported that over half (51.25%) had no formal schooling, 24% (or 30%) had not even graduated from elementary school, and just 5% had graduated from high school. Financially, most (87%) lived on P10,000 or less a month, and 45% on less than P5,000. Collectively, these findings show how rebel recruitment ruins whole families, leaving them poor, uneducated, and unable to rebuild after a family member's departure to join the ranks of the NPA (Francisco, 2025).

Table 3. *Profile of Immediate Family Members*

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage
Age	18-25	30	37.50%
	26-35	30	37.50%
	36-45	12	15.00%
	46-55	5	6.25%
	56 and above	3	3.75%
Gender	Male	49	61.25%
	Female	31	38.75%
Marital Status	Single	16	20.00%
	Married	59	73.75%
	Widowed	2	2.50%
	Separated	3	3.75%
Educational Attainment	No formal education	41	51.25%
	Elementary level	35	43.75%
	High school level	4	5.00%
Average Family Income	Below P5,000	36	45.00%
	P5,001 to P10,000	34	42.50%
	P10,001 to P15,001	7	8.75%
	P15,001 to P20,000	1	1.25%
	P20,000	2	2.50%

3.2 Level of Effectiveness of Project Libongkid as Perceived by Former Rebels, Immediate Family Members, and Community Leaders

The study examined feedback from 170 respondents regarding the efficacy of Project Libongkid, as shown in Table 4. Firstly, the results consistently indicated positive evaluations across the 10 effectiveness indicators. Specifically, the project averaged 4.47 on a 5-point scale, which was in the "Strongly Agree" range. Almost all indicators were above 4.20 with no negative ratings. Of these, three aspects were particularly successful: First, encouraging rebel surrenders scored the highest at 4.65. At 4.63, this objective was closely followed by reducing NPA recruitment. Finally, reuniting separated families received a rating of 4.62.

These findings indicate the project's family-centered approach helped address factors critical to rebel reintegration. As Abdullahi and Onapajo's (2022) research in Nigeria demonstrates, community-based strategies reduce the likelihood of former fighters rejoining armed groups. Ultimately, Project Libongkid appears to have succeeded in tackling the isolation and propaganda that often drive insurgent recruitment.

Table 4. Level of Effectiveness of Project Libongkid

Item	5		4		3		2		1		AWM	Descriptive Equivalent
	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p		
1. Encouraged the surrender of former rebel remnants.	116	68.24%	48	28.24%	6	3.53%	0	0%	0	0%	4.65	Strongly Agree (SA)
2. Assisted in psychological recovery and emotional support.	88	51.76%	69	40.59%	13	7.65%	0	0%	0	0%	4.44	Strongly Agree (SA)
3. Promoted trust between former rebels and government agencies.	104	61.18%	56	32.94%	10	5.88%	0	0%	0	0%	4.55	Strongly Agree (SA)
4. Reunited families separated by conflict.	111	65.29%	53	31.18%	6	3.53%	0	0%	0	0%	4.62	Strongly Agree (SA)
5. Helped in reducing recruitment by the NPA.	112	65.88%	53	31.18%	5	2.94%	0	0%	0	0%	4.63	Strongly Agree (SA)
6. Reinforced the role of tribal elders and community leaders.	68	40.00%	81	47.65%	21	12.35%	0	0%	0	0%	4.28	Strongly Agree (SA)
7. Provided access to livelihood and basic services for former rebels.	69	40.59%	94	55.29%	7	4.12%	0	0%	0	0%	4.36	Strongly Agree (SA)
8. Facilitated peaceful reintegration into the community.	83	48.82%	76	44.71%	11	6.47%	0	0%	0	0%	4.42	Strongly Agree (SA)
9. Strengthened coordination between AFP, PNP, LGUs, and stakeholders.	88	51.76%	73	42.94%	9	5.29%	0	0%	0	0%	4.46	Strongly Agree (SA)
10. Promoted peace and stability in the community.	78	45.88%	66	38.82%	26	15.29%	0	0%	0	0%	4.31	Strongly Agree (SA)
											4.47	Strongly Agree (SA)

3.3 Level of Seriousness of Problems Encountered During Project Libongkid Implementation

The research highlighted some challenges encountered during the implementation of Project Libongkid, scoring an overall value of 1.90 under the "Slightly Serious" category. The threats from active members of the NPA were a pressing concern, rated as a 2.98, or "moderately serious," issue that hinders the full participation of NPA remnants in reintegration programs due to fear. Logistics shortcomings and community stigma were rated as challenges deemed "slightly serious," especially in the remote communities, or sitios, of Talaingod, where the geographic isolation delayed the support delivery, which was rated as a 2.38 issue. Community participation at an issue level of 1.49 and clarity of communication at another descriptive equivalent level of 1.49 were both deemed "not serious," indicating that indigenous practices and local leadership were effectively incorporated into the project design. However, budgetary limitations hindered the equitable distribution of assistance, a common issue in government reintegration programs. A key discovery was that former rebels who followed the NPA's orders to commit violent acts still feared traditional justice, *pangayao*, which made them worry about tribal revenge, causing them to isolate themselves or face stigma, a known barrier to successful reintegration.

Table 5. Evaluation of Problems Affecting Project Libongkid Implementation

Item	5		4		3		2		1		AWM	Descriptive Equivalent
	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p	f	p		
1. Lack of resources and logistical support	0	0%	12	15.00%	22	27.50%	30	37.50%	16	20.00%	2.38	Slightly Serious
2. Poor coordination among government agencies and community leaders	0	0%	3	3.75%	15	18.75%	30	37.50%	32	40.00%	1.86	Slightly Serious
3. Threats or intimidation from remaining NPA members	0	0%	26	32.50%	31	38.75%	18	22.50%	5	6.25%	2.98	Moderately Serious
4. Cultural insensitivity or misunderstanding of tribal practices	0	0%	0	0.00%	7	8.75%	26	32.50%	47	58.75%	1.50	Not Serious
5. Insufficient community involvement in planning and decision-making	0	0%	0	0.00%	6	7.50%	27	33.75%	47	58.75%	1.49	Not Serious

6. Weak trust between former rebels and implementing agencies	0	0%	7	8.75%	8	10.00%	25	31.25%	39	48.75%	1.76	Not Serious
7. Limited involvement of elders or tribal chieftains in project planning	0	0%	1	1.25%	12	15.00%	27	33.75%	40	50.00%	1.68	Not Serious
8. Delayed or insufficient implementation of community engagement activities	0	0%	0	0.00%	6	7.50%	27	33.75%	47	58.75%	1.49	Not Serious
9. Stigma or discrimination against former rebels from the community	0	0%	12	15.00%	26	32.50%	22	27.50%	20	25.00%	2.38	Slightly Serious
10. Lack of clear communication about project goals and outcomes	0	0%	0	0.00%	6	7.50%	27	33.75%	47	58.75%	1.49	Not Serious
											1.90	Slightly Serious

3.4 Relationship Between the Level of Effectiveness of the Project Libongkid and the Profile of Respondents

As shown in Table 5, the study revealed significant relationships between Project Libongkid's effectiveness and two key respondent profiles: average family income ($r = -0.247, p = 0.001$) and role ($r = -0.178, p = 0.020$). These results suggest that they influenced impressions about the project's success. Specifically, former rebels and their immediate families gave more positive assessments of the project than community leaders, suggesting that direct lived experiences with the program's benefits—including livelihood support and family reunification—shaped their opinions. Second, respondents from low-income households thought it was more effective because it met their immediate socioeconomic needs. In contrast, program effectiveness was not significantly associated with gender ($r = 0.057, p = 0.464$), age ($r = -0.044, p = 0.573$), marital status ($r = -0.021, p = 0.783$), or educational attainment ($r = -0.037, p = 0.631$). That would suggest that Project Libongkid was inclusive to all respondents, benefiting men and women of all ages, marital statuses, and educational levels. All these results demonstrate the project's social sensitivity and the extent to which its core interventions are accessible to diverse communities.

Table 5. Statistical Relationship Between Project Libongkid Effectiveness and Demographics

Profile	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.	Decision
Role	-0.178	0.020	Reject the null hypothesis.
Gender	0.057	0.464	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Marital Status	-0.021	0.783	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Age	-0.044	0.573	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Educational Attainment	-0.037	0.631	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
Average Family Income	-0.247	0.001	Reject the null hypothesis.

3.5 Difference in the Level of Seriousness of the Problems Encountered in the Project Libongkid Across the Profile of Former Rebels

The study revealed significant gender differences in the problems encountered during the implementation of Project Libongkid, as shown in Table 6. Female former rebels considered these problems more serious than their male counterparts, with mean ranks of 49.68 for females and 37.64 for males ($p = 0.048$). This disparity suggests that female former rebels are at risk for social stigma, safety concerns, and broader reintegration issues (Steenbergen, 2022). In turn, there were no significant differences between marital status ($p = 0.742$), age ($p = 0.198$), educational attainment ($p = 0.597$), or income levels ($p = 0.123$). That demonstrates that reintegration challenges have general similarities across individuals. These findings suggest that systemic barriers, rather than individual attributes, prevent reintegration—fear of NPA remnants, social stigma, and limited livelihoods. Even educated or economically stable former rebels reportedly encountered similar difficulties as their less privileged comrades. Such results highlight the need for gender-sensitive and holistic reintegration strategies, particularly in Talaingod, Davao del Norte, to address these systemic issues.

Table 6. Mean Ranks and Significance of Problems by Demographic Variable

Variable	Categories	Mean Rank	Test Statistic	Sig.	Decision
Gender	Male	37.640	1.981	0.048	Reject the null hypothesis.
	Female	49.680			
Marital Status	Single	41.36	0.596	0.742	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	Married	40.17			
	Widowed	58			
	Separated	--			
Age	18-25	44.85	6.017	0.198	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	26-35	33.42			
	36-45	43.21			
	46-55	51.8			
	56 and above	53.5			
Educational Attainment	No formal Education	38.71	1.032	0.597	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	Elementary Level	44.5			
	High School Level	39.75			
Average Monthly Income	Below P5,000	40.05	1.544	0.123	Do not reject the null hypothesis.
	P5,001 to P10,000	76			
	P10,001 to P15,001	--			
	P15,001 to P20,000	--			
	P20,000	--			

4.0 Conclusion

The study on Project Libongkid revealed that family support is an essential aspect of reintegrating NPA remnants. Still, threats from active members of the NPA have consistently posed significant challenges in Talaingod, Davao del Norte. In particular, female NPA remnants faced greater difficulties and a distinct set of challenges, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive intervention. Indeed, the project addressed the immediate socio-economic needs of lower-income participants. Most of all, reintegration issues are highly systemic and generational; thus, they affect and run across diverse groups. These findings inform future practice and policy considerations that increasingly prioritize family-centered, gender-sensitive approaches, enhance security measures, and foster collaboration between local government officials and tribal leaders. Additionally, education and research should equip service providers and local government units to raise public awareness and reduce stigma. At the same time, ongoing studies can help develop more effective and lasting reintegration strategies by drawing on ideas from similar community-based projects.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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