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Decent Work Practices Incorporated in the Work Arrangements and Work Conditions of Mountain Guides in Barangay Cuyambay, Tanay, Rizal

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Abstract

The four decent work pillars of the International Labour Organization - Employment Opportunity, Rights at Work, Social Protection, and Social Dialogue - were introduced to establish a balanced, integrated approach to addressing social issues in the world of work. Tanay is a municipality in Rizal composed of 20 barangays. Barangay Cuyambay offers popular hiking and camping services to local and foreign tourists, and informal mountain guides work there. Despite their critical role in economic development and in promoting mountain-based destinations, these workers lack formal employment, enforceable rights at work, social protection, and strong workers' representation, which are key parameters of decent work. The study analyzed work arrangements and conditions using the decent work pillars to translate the aims of SDG#8 for mountain guides. A descriptive design with purposive sampling was used to understand respondents' work experiences. Thematic content analysis was used to examine the transcribed lived experiences of 35 mountain guides and to empirically test the researchers' proposed schema. Findings reveal a structural paradox in Barangay Cuyambay's ecotourism sector. In line with the ILO's Decent Work Framework, the experiences of mountain guides revealed a deep conflict. On the one hand, workers report profound psychological fulfillment and general satisfaction with their jobs. On the other hand, they face extreme economic insecurity, systemic exposure to physical hazards, and an absence of institutional social security nets. The development of the Mountain Guide Decent Work Schema (MGDEWS) aims to address these deficits and help workers reclaim their influence in the tourism industry.

Keywords: Informal Workers, Decent Work, Employment Opportunity, Social Protection, and SDG#8

Background of Study

Decent work, according to the ILO, is a construct that defines the important aspects of work. The normative concept was viewed as addressing the negative impact of globalization on work and employment. To some scholars, it is the foundation that will guide workers to a meaningful life when individuals and institutions carefully reflect on their four strategic pillars: employment opportunity, promotion of rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue. The informal sector in the Philippines accounts for 17 million workers and is equivalent to 36% of the total number of employed persons in the country, where two out of five workers (22%) are employed in precarious work (DTDA, 2025/2026). These workers do not have access to work benefits, health insurance or retirement savings and are often found among street vendors, jeepney drivers, agricultural workers, construction and domestic workers, including mountain guides in the tourism industry. Tour guiding workers are viewed as an important factor in increasing a country's ability to promote local services, especially to foreign tourists, and such services have contributed 8.9 percent to the gross domestic product in the Philippines (Balita, 24 Jun 2025).

The decent work pillars (DWPs) employment creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue became integral elements of the UN General Assembly meeting held in September 2015 towards the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, Goal#8 calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work. While ILO work underscores the importance of decent work, a clear gap exists in translating its ideals into the local mountain guides industry.

The municipality of Tanay has a population of 139,420 in 2020, which represents 4.19% of the total population of Rizal. Although fishing, agriculture, and local commerce are considered primary sources of income, Tanay offers a lot of breathtaking attractions for tourists and hikers because of its exquisite and towering rock formations and the mesmerizing panoramic views of the Sierra Madre. The Barangay Cuyambay is a community composed of 4,112 residents that represents 2.95% of the total population in the municipality. In the same community reside more than 30 mountain guides who contribute to the eco-tourism in the province. Oftentimes, these mountain guides provide their own toolkit, and they learn the slopes of the mountains without formal safety training. The income of

full-time guides is mostly dependent on the volume of tourists, and this irregular income is greatly affected by the changing seasons and climate change. This only shows the kind of informality in income, job insecurity, and the precarity of work that they do because mountain guides need to guarantee the safety and health of their guests while traversing the mountain. Such an unfortunate situation is oftentimes outside of the purview of policymakers and government; hence, have influenced the researchers to conduct this study and engage in understanding the social determinants that causes the informality and precarity of work in the barangay.

Taking these as foundational concepts, the researchers would like to analyze the decent work practices in the work arrangements and work conditions with the help of the decent work pillars in translating the aims of SDG 8 and propose a schema to guide workers in the province of Rizal.

Statement of Research Problem and Objectives

In realizing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 8 – decent work and economic growth, particularly Goal 8.3 *Promote policies for job creation*, Goal 8.5 *Full employment and decent work with equal pay,* and Goal 8.8 *Protect labor rights and promote safe working environmen*t, and to gain an understanding of the informality and precarity of work, the researchers would like to apply the decent work pillars in analyzing the work arrangements and work conditions of mountain tour guides in Tanay, Rizal. Particularly, this study sought to answer the question:

What are the Decent Work practices incorporated in the work arrangements and work conditions of mountain tour guides in Barangay Cuyambay, Tanay, Rizal?

Specifically, this research has the following specific aims: *(1)* identify mountain guides' work practices that promote employment opportunity; *(2)* determine work practices in tour guiding that cover rights at work; *(3)* examine tour guides' present social protection; *(4)* outline tour guiding practices that relate to social dialogue; and *(5)* propose a schema for mountain tour guides in Tanay, Rizal towards the attainment of decent work.

Literature Review

The informal economy is defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the 17th International Conference of Labour Statistics as remunerative work that is not registered, regulated, or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks, where workers do not have secure employment contracts, benefits, social protection, or workers' representation (ILO, 3 Dec 2015).

The supposed gradual transition of the informal to formal sector in society has failed to materialize as predicted by some economists and policymakers toward global economic development after World War II because the supposed shrinking of informal economic activities continues to grow and become permanent. The term informal sector was the focus of the article published in 1973 by Keith Hart, where he described the economic activities of the low-income section of the labor force in Accra, the capital and largest city in Ghana. Hart's observations gave emphasis to the broad spectrum of unregistered and unrecognized classes of livelihood that must be put into account because of their contribution to economic development. The need to understand and address informality has gained increasing attention due to its far-reaching impact on economic development among policymakers, governments, and non-government agencies, including the ILO. Decent work, according to the International Labor Organization, sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives that involve productive work opportunities, deliver fair and just income, security in the workplace, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in decisions that affect their lives, and social protection for all.

Historical view of Decent Work Pillars

As Brill (2021) observed, the increasing global competition resulted in the hollowing out of labor and working conditions in both the Global North and South, which led to informal sector jobs becoming increasingly precarious. With this overarching framework as a response to the changes that were taking place in the latter part of the 20th century as companies seek to maintain competitiveness, in 1998, ILO gave emphasis in committing member states to respect and promote core *principles and rights* through the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The following years have made ILO embraced the concept in a more satisfactory perspective as globalization emerges where *employment opportunity* shed

light on a more subtle freedom of expression and association called *social dialogue*. Rather than a more comprehensive social security, which requires contributions from both the employer and employee, *social protection* was referenced.

In the Philippines, the elaborated 70-page document of the 15-Point Labor Agenda that outlines the most important issues for workers in the Philippines aims to address the precariousness and informality of work (ITUC, 13 December 2023), which were evident in various work strategies that call for the rights, interests, and protection of workers, including those in the tourism industry. In the same vein, ILO Convention 87 on the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize, including the amended PD No. 442 of the Labor Code, which calls for protection of labor, promotion of employment, and ensuring industrial peace, has focused on the development of Filipino workers in the informal economy.

The overlooked Agent of Sustainability

According to the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA, tour guides grapple with the triple challenges of climate change, global inequality, and cultural polarization. Their work goes beyond interpreting landscapes or history because they bear a unique responsibility and opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Being outside the purview of policymakers, their impact unfolds away from major tourism structures, hence labeled by WFTGA as overlooked agents of sustainability (18 June 2025).

Barangay Cuyambay Context and Policy Background

Driving around the landlocked province of Rizal will lead you to a municipality surrounded by beautiful terrain of mountains called Tanay. Tanay, being part of the Sierra Madre Mountain range and one of the coastal towns surrounding Laguna de Bay, is fully conscious of the need to enforce environmental protection programs because of the security it provides to the ecological community in the province.

Nestled in the province of Rizal, the town is known for its picturesque natural landscape and rich cultural heritage, which attracts tourists and locals to flock to the stunning mountains of the province because of its proximity to Manila (about a 1- to 2 hours' drive). There are many activities being offered in the city, such as the yearly festivals, vibrant parades, local cuisine, and those that nature seekers long for, camping or hiking the mountain terrains of Tanay with the sea of clouds view in the

morning. Resident individuals with limited formal education and formal employment find these as compelling reasons to delve into mountain guide services in the community. For the researchers, the majestic beauty they experienced in visiting and hiking the mountains of Tanay is a needed breather from the busy life in the city and away from the strong demands of work.

The Cuyambay Tourist Guide Association (CLGA) is composed of 35 active members who bring tourists, hikers, and campers to the popular *Nagpatong Rock* and *Mt. Masungki* located in their vicinity. Such informal services have contributed to the income and wealth of the community and of the Local Government Unit (LGU). Because each barangay is blessed with unique and breathtaking views that allow work for residents, adventurous tourists and locals have plenty of options to explore. The LGU through its tourism office regulates the mountain guide service operations in each barangay in particular, the office also regulates the fares or fees, policy making process. Private tour operators are known to be actively engaging in business with the community for a long time.

Work Arrangement and Work Condition

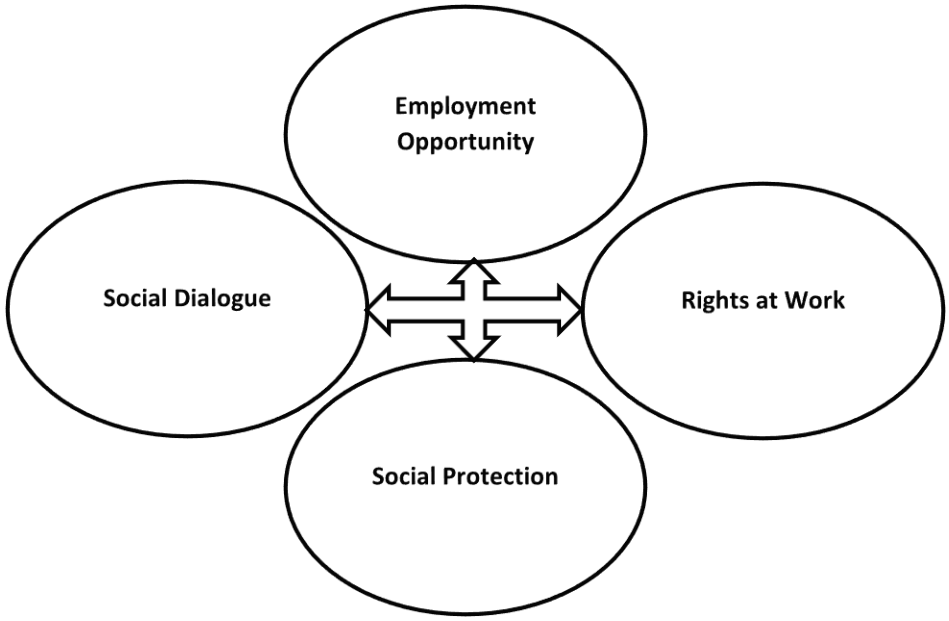
Work arrangements refer to the specific situations under which a worker performs their job. These arrangements include details about the work schedule, location, job duties, compensation, and other factors that define how and where work is to be performed. Common types of working arrangements include full-time, part-time, remote work, flexible hours or shift work (Cobrief, 2025).

The book by Tuzunkan and Altintas (2019) closely examined the changing work patterns caused by challenges and conflicts due to increasing competition among industries. The authors refer to *work conditions* as the working environment in which one works and is influenced by factors such as working hours, physical aspects, legal rights, and responsibilities. In addition, poor working conditions can damage employees' health and put their safety at risk (p. 38). The challenging terrain in the mountains of Rizal and the changing seasons are just some of the work conditions being experienced by most tour guides. All these take place in the absence of necessary tools and better infrastructure while performing their job. Such a condition can be referred to as precarious work according to Blustein et al. (2023) since there is clear evidence that it lacks many of the core attributes of decent work, including stability, security, adequate pay, benefits, and social and legal protection.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.

Dimensions of Decent Work Pillars - DWPs (Rodgers, 2002)



Source: ***Decent Work as a Goal for the Global Economy****. Rodgers (2002). https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_079060.pdf*

Because the normative and aspirational interdependency of decent work is oftentimes taken independently, Rodgers (2002), as cited by Brill (2021), stressed the inter-dependency among the recognized objectives of DWPs. Such dependence of the pillars on one another means that promoting employment without considering the quality and content of jobs is not progress; neither is promoting rights to work if the person does not have it while representation and social dialogue are needed to ensure that people's voices are expressed and heard. Psychologists argue that ILO's concept of decent work can be enhanced through a focus on the lived experience of the individual worker and maintaining that the meaning and purpose of work are also important issues to consider (Brill, 2021).

According to Rodgers (2002), the notion of decent work is an attempt to capture, in everyday language, the integration of social and

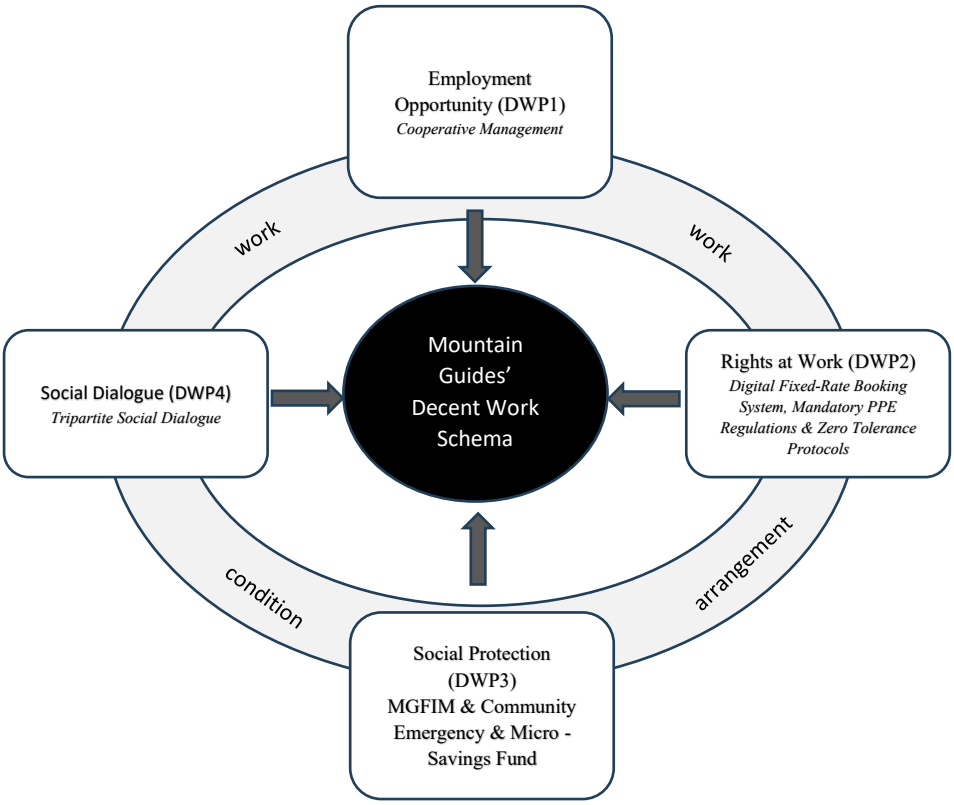
economic goals that brings together rights, employment, representation, and security. First dimension concerns *work* itself that is best expressed as adequate opportunities for productive and meaningful work in decent conditions that take into accounts the intensity of work hours, a living income, possibilities for development and opportunities to use one's capabilities. The second dimension concerns basic *rights at work* that are considered basic enabling rights that provide a base on which other rights and capabilities can be built. The third dimension concerns *security*. It is a powerful need that can be achieved through a formal social insurance system which provides for contingencies such as illness, unemployment or old age; through informal mechanisms of solidarity and sharing; through investment in workplace safety; and through labor market institutions and policies which protect workers against layoffs. The last dimension concerns *representation and dialogue* in which people's voices can be heard and are a crucial aspect of decent work. While for most workers, the classic route to representation is through trade unions, decent work includes work beyond wage labor and often encompasses other forms of organization such as community-level or self-employment. Rodgers highlights that despite these four dimensions having their own characteristics, they are interconnected because they jointly contribute to social integration, poverty eradication, and personal fulfillment.

Figure 1 underscores Rodgers' emphasis on the interdependency among the four (4) recognized objectives of decent work, stating that "*promoting employment without considering the quality and content of those jobs is no recipe for progress; promoting rights at work without worrying about whether or not there is work for those who want it is equally fruitless; and representation and social dialogue are needed to ensure that people's voices are expressed and heard".*

Operational Framework

Figure 2.

Mountain Guide Decent Work Schema (MGDEWS)



The Mountain Guides Decent Work Schema (MGDEWS), as shown in Figure 2, aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical application of decent work practices mainly in the tour guiding industry. Theoretically, it extends existing models of analyzing how and where work is to be performed and the employment conditions of mountain guide workers by integrating the decent work pillars DWPs. MGDEWS starts with the identification of the work arrangements and work conditions of the participants. The eight constructs (*employment security, labor market security, income security, social protection, work-life balance & well-being, fair treatment, occupational safety and health, voice and representation)* in the Decent Work Assessment Instrument developed by HIVA-KU Leuven (2024) were categorized using the 4 decent work dimensions by Rodgers (2002), namely *employment opportunity, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue*. Applying these relevant constructs has assisted the

researchers in designing a schema (DWP1, DWP2, DWP3, & DWP4) for mountain guides that leads to the attainment of decent work among guide workers in Tanay, Rizal.

Hypotheses/Propositions

With the given framework, the researchers hypothesized that:

H1: The formalization of the tour guiding mechanism significantly increases sustainable employment opportunities and income stability for mountain guides in Barangay Cuyambay

H2: The enforcement of fundamental rights at work is directly linked to improved tour guiding work and reduced job exploitation among mountain guides

H3: The current level of social protection among mountain guides is inadequate, and improving it would significantly enhance their economic security

H4: The presence of an effective social dialogue mechanism leads to improved working conditions and better representation of the mountain guides in the barangay

H5: A holistic schema integrating improved employment practices, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue is perceived as an effective mechanism in facilitating the attainment of decent work

Methodology

Research Design

The study embraced a descriptive design with the support of a thematic content analysis in identifying the decent work practices incorporated in the work arrangements and work conditions of mountain tour guides in Barangay Cuyambay.

The researchers started with data familiarization from the transcribed data to build a deep and intimate understanding of the data. Systematic coding followed, where meaningful units of data were used for theme construction; validation and refinement were applied to weave the themes into a coherent narrative. Such procedures have assisted the researchers in connecting the findings into the research questions and the development of MGDEWS.

The descriptive profile summary presented the demographic characteristics of the participants. To empirically test the researchers' proposed schema, a thematic content analysis was utilized to make sense of the transcribed lived experiences data of the respondents. The themes generated have shown significant results highlighting the lack and strong presence of decent work practices in the shared experiences of guide workers. To elucidate the descriptive summary, categories, and themes, a data triangulation approach was employed in analyzing respondents' data using a semi-structured in-depth interview with key informants (Barangay Official) and a focus group discussion (FGD) conducted on March 20, 2026. A follow-up interview was conducted last April 27, 2026. Four (4) officers of CLGA accommodated the researchers to validate some pertinent results in the FGD.

Research Approaches

To create a better understanding of the topic, the researchers used a qualitative research approach guided by research questions relating to decent work practices among guide workers to secure the data needed and develop a better understanding and analysis of the decent work phenomenon. In forming a lucid discussion of the results, literature from existing journals, articles, and reference textbooks was used to support relevant findings in the study.

Research Participants / Respondents

The participants are the identified mountain guides in Barangay Cuyambay, Tanay, Rizal, who qualify under the following criteria: (1) *a mountain guide residing in the barangay,* (2) *with at least 1 year of work experience,* (3) *male or female,* (4) *willing to participate in the study.* The selection of Barangay Cuyambay in Tanay, Rizal was made because of its popular mountains, particularly the "Nagpatong Rock" and Mt. Masungki. Both mountains were featured by AllTrails.com among the top 10 mountain destinations in Tanay, Rizal.

Sampling Design

35 active mountain guides participated in the study. The desired sample size was determined with the help and assistance of the Cuyambay Local Guide Association (CLGA) President. Purposive sampling was applied based on the relevance to the research question, hence enabling the researchers to gain a deep understanding of the expressed work experiences of the respondents.

Limitation of the Study

While the membership of CLGA has increased over the years, the 35 active mountain guides who participated in the study clearly represented the majority of guide workers not only in the Barangay but in Tanay in general. Despite the locale in the study being referred to as Barangay Cuyambay, the participating guide workers are permitted to work, accept guide assignments, and were assigned to guest bookings outside their Barangay and within the municipality of Tanay as shown in the permit issued to them by the LGU; hence, they can express their lived experiences in the tour guiding industry around the province of Tanay, Rizal. This is because of the limited number of accredited mountain guides in Rizal.

Measurement and Instrumentation

The Decent Work Assessment Instrument was utilized to analyze the decent work practices of mountain guide workers in Tanay, Rizal. The tool was developed by HIVA-KU Leuven (2024), and is useful for gaining a better understanding of the informality and precarity of work to explore ways of improving work conditions. The tool is publicly available at the Decent Work Toolbox with URL: https://www.decentworktoolbox.be/tools-and-guidelines/the-decent-work-assessment-tool and was used in a study about Decent Work among Beekeeping Farmers in Uganda. The researchers tailored the questionnaire to the present setting involving mountain guides as respondents. The instrument starts with an assessment of the informal workers' demographic characteristics. The core of the instrument is the decent work dimensions derived from the four pillars of the decent work agenda: employment creation (*employment security, labor market security, income security)*, social protection (*work-life balance and well-being)*, rights at work (*fair*

treatment, occupational safety and health), and social dialogue (*voice and representation)*. Aside from the use of the Decent Work Assessment (DWA) Instrument, research questions were asked from the participants during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Research Ethics Approaches

Ethical approval was secured from the university's Research Ethics Board before the conduct of the study. The consent of the participants was sought prior to them answering the paper questionnaire and participating in the FGD. The researchers maintained utmost confidentiality of the information provided to them. The contact details of the researchers were provided to the participants for any questions or clarifications they may have about the study.

Results and Discussion

The researchers examined the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the respondents to better understand the background and representation of the mountain guides in Barangay Cuyambay, Tanay, Rizal.

The descriptive summary profile presented interesting findings in the demographic characteristics of the respondents, focusing on the *deep-rooted community localization and longevity,* which means the mountain guides are heavily anchored in the local community, showcasing immense institutional knowledge but potentially low in educational mobility. The basic educational attainment data highlighted tourism as a vital livelihood lifeline for individuals with limited formal academic options. While there is a striking generational residency (82.85%), showing the respondents have lived in Barangay Cuyambay for more than 10 years hence, indicating that tourism directly employs the native population. The substantial field expertise (*40% of the guides*) that is between 7 and over 10 years of work experience means that the guides hold a deep, seasoned understanding of the local terrain and safety protocols. While tourism offers crucial local employment, the structural nature of the work lacks long-term stability and exhibits a significant gender imbalance (*68.57% are male and 25.71% are female*), highlighting the physically demanding nature of the job or traditional gender roles in outdoor guiding. There is an extreme gender disparity, as well as a prevalence of part-time work along with a massive

lack of full-time or formal work security (*51.42% are employed by private tour operators on a part-time basis*) among guide workers. With a prime-age workforce, this signifies that the industry draws heavily on individuals in their physical prime. Such a significant finding presents employment precariousness amidst strong male dominance in the Barangay. The local government unit exercises near-monopoly control over the distribution of tourism opportunities in the area. *Institutional centralization and governance* display a staggering control (*97.14% of trekking assignments*) by the LGU. This shows a top-down, highly regulated eco-tourism model where guides completely depend on municipal systems for their daily income without social benefits.

Integration of DWPs in the Work Arrangements and Work Conditions

The perceived expressions of decent work practices by the participants were categorized and then themed as (1) *Work Arrangement* **(WA)** that captures how tour guides managed their schedules, job duties, locations, and income and (2) *Work Conditions* **(WC)** that highlight the physical environment, safety realities, legal protections, and organizational support system of the guide workers. The shared experiences of the guide respondents were treated with thematic content analysis procedures and methodology. The researchers were confronted with the descriptive details demonstrating the guide workers' perceived knowledge and understanding of their present job (WA as defined by Cobrief, 2025 and WC as described by Tuzunkan and Altintas, 2019).

Table 1.

*Decent Work Pillar **(DWP1) Employment Opportunity** - Descriptive Summary of Labor Market Security and Income Security*

Perceived Expression of Decent Work Practices	Categories	Themes
Most respondents find it difficult (68.57%) to find guests who pay a fair price for tours	**Work schedule, location, job duties, compensation**	**WORK ARRANGEMENT (WA)**
Many feel it is likely (48.57%) that they can sustain or grow their income in future years		
A large group very much (45,72%) fears having little or no income from tour guiding		
Labor Market Security		
Most guides were out of work for 1-4 months (77.14%) over the last year, especially during pandemic		
Nearly half say their work is regular (48.57%) throughout the year		
A vast majority received yes (88.57%) answers regarding on-the-job training in the past year		
Income Security		
Annual earnings fall between 10,000-15,000 (71.42%) for most workers		
Some have extra jobs that pay equal or more (37.14%) than their main job		
Over half report they can (51.43%) save some money		
A notable portion strongly disagree (34.29%) that their pay matches their hard work		

DWP1 addresses Objective 1, which *identifies the mountain guides' decent work practices in the promotion of employment opportunity.* It uncovers a fragile economic foundation and evaluates the capacity of local eco-tourism to generate viable, sustainable, and reliable livelihoods. Tour guiding provides local employment but fails to guarantee basic stable financial security. There is an observed severe income deficit that falls critically below any functional living wage, turning eco-tourism in the Barangay into an auxiliary survival mechanism rather than a sustainable career. Such a deficit failed to achieve full and productive employment, as

indicated in the ILO target of SDG 8.5. The extreme revenue vulnerability indicates that the market condition in the community is highly punitive since guide workers experienced constant delays in income opportunities because of the slow hiking pace or movements of guests that restrict them from getting more hiking bookings, especially during the rainy season. In some cases, guide workers are also affected by guests' cancellations of their bookings that may result to loss of income. Income divergence shows mountain guides dissatisfaction in their income thus perceived their compensation is appropriate for their efforts. To survive, the majority of the respondents rely on secondary jobs or alternative work. Alarming to note that at some point over the past year, mountain guides were reported being out of work (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic). This could be because of the high dependency of workers income from the local tourists who visit the mountains in consideration of the unpredictable weather condition in the country. Since the Philippines is frequently hit by typhoons, this made the booking schedules erratic. The absence of income security and safety nets for cancellations is in contrast to the aims of SDG 8.8 that protect labor rights and promote a safe and secure working environment for all. Although majority of the respondents find it very difficult to find an alternative occupation with similar or higher income, this may have an adverse effect on eco-tourism in the Barangay once these mountain guides decide to leave their tour guiding job. The same dilemma was described in the WFTGA (2025) article: if tour guides remain systematically overlooked, their transformative impact in the attainment of SDGs will be meaningless.

Further data reveals that while access is highly available through the local government, the quality and stability of these opportunities remain weak. This is because despite their high access to the mountain, training, and work opportunities, they are low in predictability since their work assignments and income are regulated by the private tour operators, LGU or tourism office. This finding clearly shows the strong presence of third-party regulations without formal labor protection, which is in contrast to the target aims of SDG 8.3 that promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities and formalization. The absence of a unified framework as described by Recimilla et al., (2025), may result to missed opportunities in professionalizing the sector and is considered to be a significant barrier to ensuring quality, safety, and sustainability in mountain tourism.

Table 2.

*Decent Work Pillar **(DWP2) Rights at Work** - Descriptive Summary of Fair Treatment.*

Perceived Expression of Decent Work Practices	Categories	Themes
Over the past 12 months, 31.43% of respondents reported being subject to verbal abuse or threats during their work	**Working environment, physical aspect, legal rights and responsibilities**	**WORK CONDITION (WC)**
Over the past 12 months, 28.57% reported experiencing bullying, harassment, and violence		
Gender Equity		
A strong majority of 88.57% confirmed that female workers receive equal income for the same tour guiding work		
Financial Integrity		
About 34.29% noted that guests occasionally pay a lower price than initially agreed upon		

Table 2 *determines decent work practices in tour guiding that cover rights at work* (Objective 2). It described the tour guiding job in Barangay Cuyambay as physically grueling and structurally hazardous because it exposes workers to a dangerous environment with minimal protective gear. Despite the impressive number of health and safety training sessions received by the respondents, actual compliance remains low because most of them find the use of a harness or personal protective equipment (PPE) distracting and annoying. The behavioral resistance directly undermines SDG target#8.8, which mandates a secure working environment, because when equipment or cultural resistance leads to non-compliance, the right to a safe workplace is compromised, which transforms preventable hazards into active threats. The same problems were reiterated in the book of Andrades et al. (2024), where safety and security were seen to be a serious concern in tourism, especially with the advent of the 9/11 attack, SARS, & COVID-19.

The perceived health threat among guide workers leads to high anxiety over physical well-being since the majority of the respondents believed their health is often or always at risk due to their work. This could be attributed to the physical labor that they experience since mountain guides are consistently carrying heavy loads (camping and personal belongings of guests) or performing repetitive work under extreme weather or intense heat, especially during summertime. Adding to the physical threats is the lack of social safety because the guide workers expressed having experienced verbal abuse aside from bullying over the past year. For the researchers, the absence of an enforceable guest code of conduct does not translate into protection of labor rights, particularly workplace dignity. The health hazard being experienced by the respondents due to intense heat or erratic weather condition in the Philippines is not the only risks encountered by the mountain guides but more importantly the environmental hazards being posed by the rigid or poor infrastructure of the "hagdanan" or stairs the guests and workers climbed up to reach the summit of Nagpatong Rock (mountain) because it made out of bamboo and often become slippery during rainy season. The lead researcher experienced the said terrain in 2025. This also includes the stairs going down the summit, where guests rely on their guide workers while they climb across the side of the mountain. The structural neglect by local administrative bodies failed to secure safe work environments hence, lack mitigation of workplace risk that is fully in contrast to the decent work pillar of rights at work. Workplace rights are also challenged by some bad guest behavior, hence the economic fragility in DWP1 is now compounded by compromised rights at work which requires immediate attention of the CLGA, Tour operators, and LGU. Interesting to note is the gender equity. It is highly respected despite the existence of extreme gender disparity. Such exemplifies the successful institutionalization of equity framework thereby achieving the aims of SDG target 8.5 of equal pay for work of equal value.

Table 3.

*Decent Work Pillar **(DWP3) Social Protection** - Descriptive Summary of Work-life Balance & Well-being and Occupational Safety & Health*

Perceived Expression of Decent Work Practices	Categories	Themes
Health insurance coverage is absent for a vast majority, with 80% reporting no health insurance	**Working environment, physical aspect, legal rights and responsibilities**	**WORK CONDITION (WC)**
Occupational accident or work injury insurance is also lacking (82.26%		
Paid sick leave in case of incapacity to work due to health reasons is unavailable to 82.86%		
Pension fund access or contributions are limited, with 74.29% lacking access or not contributing		
Disability benefit would only be accessible to 31.43%		
Sufficient savings to cover living costs for at least two months following loss of guiding work are reported at 17.14%		
Work-Life Balance and Well-Being		
Weekly rest periods of at least one day are secured by 74.29%		
Meaningful work is experienced regularly, with 60% always feeling they do useful work		
Physical exhaustion at the end of the workday is prevalent, with 60% always feeling exhausted		
Satisfaction with working conditions on the tour guiding job reaches 60%		
Occupational Safety and Health		
Protective equipment usage varies; the majority (31.43%) use them only sometimes or omit necessary items (harness)		
Health and safety training for tour guiding has been received by 94.29%		
Heavy load and repetitive movements are common among 54.28% tour guides		
Exposure to chemical, biological, or infectious hazards occurs rarely (45.71%)		
Environmental exposures to loud noise or extreme temperatures happen sometimes among 45.71% of the guides		
Access to clean water, food, and toilets in the mountains is severely restricted, with 54.28% having no access to any of the three amenities		
Perceived health risk due to work is prominent, with 45.71% often feeling their health is at risk		

The analysis *examines present social protection among tour guides that relates to decent work* (Objective 3***)*** and finds lack of social protection as the most alarming finding in the study. The near-total absence of social safety nets among guide workers was evident in the data gathered from the respondents. Mountain guide workers lack health insurance, and the majority are entirely uninsured against occupational accidents or injuries. This exposure is highly dangerous given the physical risks of mountain guiding. The direct target misalignment in the aims of SDG 8.8 shows a concrete failure to promote safe and secure working environments for precarious workers in Tanay, Rizal. In cases where a guide worker falls ill or experiences an emergency, most of them receive no paid sick leave. Because of their low wages, the majority of the respondents lack the capacity to save and cover medical expenses and basic living costs in case they lose their job. Such absence of income security and a living wage fails to address the targets misaligned in the aims of SDG 8.3 & 8.5. Similarly, most guide workers have no access to or connection with a pension fund for long-term survival. These findings are viewed by the researchers as detrimental not only to the worker but to their family since the majority of them are considered head of the family. The low income as regulated by LGU prevents guide workers to save money and build financial cushion in case they lose their job is adding more effect to the eco-tourism model in the barangay. The data exposes an institutional vacuum, leaving workers entirely exposed to health, physical, and financial crises.

While known to be the weakest pillar, DWP3 reveals a fascinating psychological coping mechanism. Despite poor financial returns and dangerous physical conditions, guides remain deeply tied to their jobs. The strong job meaning and satisfaction as perceived by the respondents indicate an overall satisfaction among guide workers. There is high morale that persists even though the majority of them always end their days completely exhausted physically, especially when guests prefer traversing in two or more mountains. Such positive perception in mountain climbing was evident and observed among local guides in San Rafael, Rizal (Camarador et al., 2020).

In analyzing the decent work pillar of social protection for the guide workers, the researchers assume that growth must be inclusive and subjective satisfaction cannot substitute for objective rights; hence, the systemic exclusion of informal workers from national labor protection is a

serious concern that must be addressed to attain decent work in the tour guiding industry.

Table 4

*Decent Work Pillar **(DWP4) Social Dialogue** - Descriptive Summary of Voice and Representation*

Perceived Expression of Decent Work Practices	Categories	Themes
Access and Freedom	**Working environment, physical aspects, legal rights and responsibilities**	**WORK CONDITION (WC)**
Most reported having access to organizations like an Association (85.71%)		
The same majority feels free to join or form an Association		
Having 65.71% membership to CLGA		
Representation of Interests		
Opinions on how well professions are represented to businesses and the government are divided: 28.57% tend to agree		

Table 4 *outlines tour guiding practices that relate to social dialogue* (Objective 4). Social dialogue measures the freedom, capacity, and effectiveness of guide workers to organize and advocate for their interests with private tour operators and LGUs. The researchers were amused to uncover the solid organizational (CLGA) foundation among the guide workers. The excellent freedom of association (SDG target 8.8) is highly commendable. Such strong presence translates to high participation, as shown in their active membership in CLGA. The resilience is anchored in their high access to associations. The majority of the respondents can access and freely join representative organizations, and most of them are active members of the Cuyambay Local Guide Association (CLGA). As of data gathering, CLGA now has more than 60 mountain guide memberships. The high membership must be maintained and leveraged by the CLGA to solidify its demand for formalization.

While there is an observed strong associational power among guide workers, institutional representation still falls short when dealing with external groups, especially with the Local Government Unit (LGU) and private tour operators. Many workers disagree that CLGA successfully

protects their interests against private tour operators and LGUs. The weak collective bargaining that contradicts the aims of SDG target 8.8 indicates the inability of the CLGA to protect interests against the other actors in the industry. The lack of lobbying power can be attributed to the kind of work tour guides often provide, being sole traders without strong institutional representation, as referred to by the World Federation of Tourist Guide Association (18 June 2025).

The establishment of a formalized tripartite council (CLGA, LGU, & Private tour operators) is presumed to legally bind agreements among themselves.

The use of social dialogue was strongly recommended to strengthen CLGA collective bargaining power, especially on the issues of environmental safety (*to replace the bamboo stairs at Nagpatong Rock with metal stairs*) and verbal abuse from local and foreign guests. These are in contrasts with the International Labor Organization fundamental principles and rights at work as mentioned by Edralin and Pastrana (2024), hence, must be addressed seriously by CLGA. The study suggests that CLGA must strongly and persistently use social dialogue channels to mandate infrastructure upgrades.

While the capacity to organize exists, the effectiveness of advocacy is constrained. To achieve true alignment with SDG 8, the study recommends that structural friction between the CLGA, tour operators, and the LGU must be resolved through formalized social dialogue.

Table 5

Perceived Expression of Decent Work Practices - FGDs and KIIs

Meaning Units/Codes from the Participants	Decent Work Pillars	Themes
Good services are provided to guests, meet foreign tourist	**DWP1**	**Work Arrangements**
Work in another barangay if needed		
Work as a tricycle driver if there is no hike job		
Expect to be given a "tip" by the guests		
Work permit is provided by the LGU to work within Rizal. LGU regulates fare for hike		
Private tour operator manages guest booking		
Oftentimes, work for 10 hours	**DWP2**	**Work Conditions**
provide safety rules, served as photographer of guests		
Provide warm-up exercises and require medical status; briefing given to tourists		
use two-way Radio for communication	**DWP3**	
in cases of verbal abuse, explain to the guests CLGA policy		
Report to work despite being sick		
CLGA provides some equipment and benefits (first aid kit, two-way radio, food during meeting, Noche Buena package during Christmas, and budget for outing)	**DWP4**	
CLGA provides direction in tour guiding service, conducts meetings and discuss issues, present financial status		

The coded meaning units in Table 5 pertain to the meaningful results of the data triangulation procedures (FGD & KII) employed in the analysis of the study that highlights the flexibility and precariousness of the role that

the researchers could not deduce from the descriptive summary analysis of the respondents presented in Tables 1 to 4. Significant findings reveal a complex tour guiding landscape for mountain guides, characterized by a distinct contrast between high engagement and systemic operational vulnerabilities.

In the analysis, guide workers perform multiple tasks beyond guiding, such as acting as a photographer and porter carrying bags. These range of skills that are encapsulated within the mountain guides are while outside of the actual job are found vital for both safety and client management (Irwin et al., 2023). When tourism is slow, they turn to driving tricycles to earn a living. There is also an observed extension of working hours since the daily shifts often stretch up to 10 hours, and to augment slow tourist visits, guides must adapt to changing locations by working across different barangays as needed. Income uncertainty, as described in the descriptive summary, was somehow supplemented by client tips, making earnings unstable and dependent on tourist generosity rather than a fixed salary. Lastly, there is an observed strong institutional coordination since the guiding operations rely on a multi-layered structure because private tour operators handle bookings while LGUs issue work permits. Such precarious and informalized livelihood indicates that while tourism generates local employment, the work is highly seasonal and unstable; that is why guide workers must resort to secondary informal jobs to survive, hence highlighting the **absence of DWP1 or Employment Creation.**

Alarming results emphasized the occupational safety gaps that are faced by the guide workers, such as refusing to use a safety harness at Nagpatong Rock and, because of economic pressures, reporting to work even when some of them are sick. Such pressure was also evident in the limited social protection because of restricted or self-funded social security system (SSS) contributions among tour guides; hence, there is a **lack of DWP3 or Social Protection,** therefore exposing the workers to high occupational hazards.

Interesting and meaningful is the **strong presence of DWP4 or Social Dialogue.** As the strongest pillar in the analysis, the CLGA serves as a vital platform for social dialogue, allowing workers to voice issues and manage the financial status of their association. However, the active but resource-constrained grassroots agency that exists in the Barangay refers only to minor welfare packages and has limited capacity to protect workers.

Although the LGU formalized the guides by requiring the necessary permits, fundamental rights regarding long work hours and labor boundaries are poorly enforced.

While the mountain guides maintain a highly organized Association, their capacity to draft collective proposals to the LGU to change the bamboo stairs at Nagpatong Rock to steel-made stairs remains unresolved. This only shows that the LGU and private tour operators rely on transferring operational expenses and safety liabilities onto the informal mountain guide workers. Therefore, guide workers lack institutional safeguards against physical strain and emotional/verbal abuse from guests, which indicates the **low existence of DWP2-Rights at Work.**

Considering the significant findings, the study proposes the MGDEWS, or the ***Mountain Guide Decent Work Schema*** (Objective 5), in the attainment of Decent Work among the guide workers in Tanay, Rizal.

DWP1 – In attaining Objectives 1 & 4 - <u>Institutional Co-Governance</u>

1) *Shift to Cooperative Management*
   Transitioning tour assignments away from a top-down LGU and private tour operators' monopoly toward a Community Cooperative Model. This will empower the organized CLG Association members to directly manage schedules, reduce income irregularity, and eliminate seasonal worker gaps. Considering the positive influence of cooperative management on the employment and income opportunities of mountain guides.

2) *Tripartite Social Dialogue Council*
   Form a formal council linking the CLGA, Private Tour Operators, and the LGU. This will directly address the advocacy gap, giving the mountain guides a real voice in setting local tourism policies. This considers the positive influence of a tripartite social dialogue council on the mountain guides.

   The observed deficit in recognizing guides as local partners in awareness-raising, having direct access to the target audience as described by WFTGA (2025) can be mitigated by a strong partnership with politicians and decision-makers. The same findings were reiterated by Dewi et al. (2025), where sustainable

tourism requires an integrated and collaborative approach involving government, private sector, and local communities.

DWP2 – In attaining Objective 2 - <u>Enforcement of Work Rights & Field Infrastructure</u>

1) *Digital Fixed-Rate Booking System*
For the CLGA to launch a centralized booking platform that requires guests to pay in full upfront. This will eliminate security, payment, and price-cutting issues and prevent payment delays from guests. The researchers can assist the CLGA in developing the said platform, given their intensive IT background.

As Andrades (2024) posits, on the basis of collaboration at the destination level, the development of solutions that provide a convenient customer experience, such as the proposed Digital Fixed Rate Booking System in this study, will augment the safety and security constraints being faced by the participants. In the systematic review made by Khizar et al. (2023), and in mentioning Tuomi et al., (2020), the use of automation and ICT is found to be significant in employment creation.

2) *Eco-Trail Infrastructure Upgrades*
Build basic, sustainable trail amenities, especially going up the summit of Nagpatong Rock (mountain).

3) *Mandatory PPE Regulations & Zero-Tolerance Protocols*
Craft a policy that will strictly enforce "No PPE, No Guiding" rules backed by cooperative-supplied harnesses or equipment to lower the health risk rate. Currently, implement a strict Code of Conduct for tourists to protect guide workers from the incidence of verbal abuse and harassment.

DWP3 – In attaining Objective 3 - <u>The Occupational Social Safety Net</u>

1) *The "Mountain Green Fee Insurance Mechanism (MGFIM)*
MGFIM will introduce a mandatory LGU-regulated "Eco-Guide Welfare Fee" into every tourist registration. The aim is for the fee to directly fund Group Accident Insurance and PhilHealth/SSS contributions for the guides, which will correct the gap in accident

coverage and in case of job loss or low season due to weather disturbance

2) *Community Emergency & Micro-Savings Fund*
The creation of CLGA Cooperative to set up dedicated micro-savings schemes. This will support the CLGA programs and will provide emergency loans to the guide workers who currently cannot survive during loss of income or even in cases of pandemics and typhoons.

DWP4 – Sustain Strong Associations' Social Dialogue

Maintain and leverage the CLGA associational position to demand a formalized position in the tourism industry.

Conclusion

In analyzing decent work practices in the work arrangements (WA) and work conditions (WC) with the help of decent work pillars in translating the aims of SDG 8 among guide workers in the province of Rizal, the study underscores the informality and precarity of work in the mountain guiding industry. The lived experiences reveal a critical duality in how decent work pillars (DWPs) manifest within contemporary WA and WC. While elements of structural support and personal financial agency exist, the mountain guides in Barangay Cuyambay are heavily undercut by systemic income insecurity and market volatility. Firstly, the volatile work arrangements highlight the precarious labor market security. Secondly is the compromised work conditions echo in the subjective social value of the mountain guides being complemented by the strong organizational resiliency.

In summary, the integration of DWPs in the tour guiding industry is incomplete and in contrast with the supposed interdependence of the four pillars. Guide workers are trapped in a cycle of informal employment, indicating a shallow formalization since their income cannot provide a living wage. The absence of an institutional reporting channel or legal protection against misconduct by guests violates the rights of workers. The deficiency in social protection leaves the guide workers entirely exposed to long-term economic shocks with no safety net for injury, disability, or retirement. The Cuyambay Local Guide Association (CLGA) requires functioning, responsive collective efforts in presenting their members'

interests to the LGU and private tour operators to sustain leverage in social dialogue. For tour guiding to genuinely align with decent work standards, LGU, CLGA, and private tour operators must shift from merely providing skill-based training to establishing an equitable income framework, stabilizing seasonal employment gaps, and rectifying the mismatch between labor and income. The proposed MGDEWS are articulated to address the gaps.

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