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of Ifugao Weavers



Weaving Back the Forgotten Ifugao Culture

Ifugao is one of the provinces of the Cordillera Administrative Region in the Philippines, one of the indigenous cultural communities in the country. Weaving in the province has been declining in the past decades due to the disinterest of the younger generation in culture and rice terracing. It was not a lucrative livelihood until the organization of the Kiyangan Weavers Association (KIWA) in 2016. KIWA is an organization of weavers in Ifugao that advocates the revival of indigenous tapestry and design vis-à-vis its relevance in material culture and its association in natural heritage. Ifugao natural and cultural heritage, may it be tangible and intangible, always link to the Ifugao Rice Terraces and Ifugao lifecycle that obliges the performance of rituals where appropriate tapestry are required.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the organization is the revival of traditional weaving designs/patterns and methods that has been forgotten over the past century. They used old references such as books and photographs to study the designs/patterns and attempted to weave it until they brought it back in this generation. While KIWA successfully revitalized the weaving culture of Ifugao, the greater challenge is to encourage the present generation to learn the said culture. KIWA has 45 weaver-members across the province where the oldest is 82 years old and 41 as the youngest. They established a weaving center that hopes to attract people to participate in the weaving industry while it serves as a hub for weavers to learn from elder or master weavers.

Indigenous Knowledge as Pandemic Response

Prior to the incidence of the COVID-19 in the Philippines, the KIWA weavers are diligently working to produce market demands of indigenous textiles all over the country. While most of the weavers are subsistence farmers as their primary livelihood, weaving provided source of income to cope with the cash economy enabling them to send their children to school. During the onset of the pandemic, the whole country was placed under community quarantine, forcing the citizens to stop their economic movements. This greatly affected the income of the organization as it forced them to stop the operation of the weaving center. Despite this, the weavers continually worked at their own homes. The members claimed that weaving during the pandemic lockdown actually kept them mentally sound as the sudden movement restriction has caused anxiety to other people.

Living in an indigenous community where government food aids can be difficult, the weavers opted to utilize the natural heritage in their villages. While on lockdown, the members revived various indigenous knowledge of survival such traditional food preservation, *baddangan* or community support system, hunting and gathering in the nearby forests and the practice of planting food resources to ensure food sovereignty amid the pandemic.

Baddangan, a Community Support System



Some of the areas in Ifugao are still remote that can only be reached by foot. Infrastructure development are difficult since the terrain are challenging. Public information are delayed and sometimes prejudiced by political and jurisdictional issues. Villagers in these areas usually carry their crops to be sold at the center town. During the community quarantine, the government strictly imposed health protocols such as wearing of face masks and scheduled market days of specific village. These rules are new to the villagers from the far-flung areas leaving them in despair. Face masks that are sold in the market are too expensive for them while being unaware of market schedules.

In consideration of the said case, the KIWA started to collect their woven outputs and made them into face masks. For two months of weaving during the community quarantine, they were able to make more than 3,000 face masks and distributed them to the villagers from the distant areas. Some were donated to pandemic front liners. Despite having a great financial loss by 95% for being unable to sell their products, they persisted to work to help each other and those who are in need.

KIWA facilitated donation drives for those who are stranded in the urban areas in the country. They sent food reliefs and cash donations to the family of their members. While on the ground, they organized equitable distribution of food assistance to their members who are most in need. While the Philippines is still in community quarantine, the members of the organization are dependent to each other socially, mentally and economically.

Continuing Cultural Conservation

KIWA through the Save the Ifugao Terraces Movement, a cultural and civic organization, partnered with various institutions to proliferate indigenous peoples education. Among its collaborative partners are the Ifugao State University, Ifugao Satoyama Meister Training Program, Center for Taiwan-Philippines for Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Sustainable Studies among others. These partners organizes cultural and natural heritage conservation activities such as lectures/fora on IP education, natural heritage conservation, weaving and other material culture exhibition, training programs, indigenous skills development, enterprising with nature and other related activities.