

CARABAOS, FARMING AND RESISTANCE



INTEREST
BLOG

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BY NIKKI MALAZARTE



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Half of my life I grew up both in the metropolitan and rural side of the Philippines. My family especially my lolas found it was important for me to understand our privilege as Filipinas with degrees by providing affordable housing to students from the rural provinces, visiting every weekend our relatives living in Lambunao, and respecting indigenous people of the Philippines practices for they have sustained the lands far better than any of us. Since then I have understood that rural development in the Philippines has impacted the social and economic opportunities of both rural Filipinos/Filipinas and Indigenous groups of the Philippines.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has invested in rural and indigenous communities for 40 years, empowering them to lessen poverty and increase food security, enhance access to nutritional goods and build up resilience. Since 1978, they have provided over \$19.7 billion in grants and low-interest loans to socio-economic agricultural development projects. IFAD has found evidence that economies who have greater gender equality have more access to opportunities, benefits, higher economic growth and better quality of life for all. Since IFAD is firmly committed to empowering women and working with families, communities and countries to build gender equality at every stage, in 2012, IFAD's Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment was approved.



"IFAD HAS FOUND EVIDENCE THAT ECONOMIES WHO HAVE GREATER GENDER EQUALITY HAVE MORE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES, BENEFITS, HIGHER ECONOMIC GROWTH AND BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL."

IFAD's Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is central to equipping poor rural women and men to enhance their food security and nutrition, increase incomes, boost resilience and minimize the gender gap as much as possible. IFAD delivers the policy by addressing gender equality as a cross-cutting theme, where socio-economic agricultural development projects, policies and programs take into account differences that exist among women and men, dynamics of gender roles and relations. The policy is also enacted by providing ways of access for young rural women to receive economic and social development opportunities.

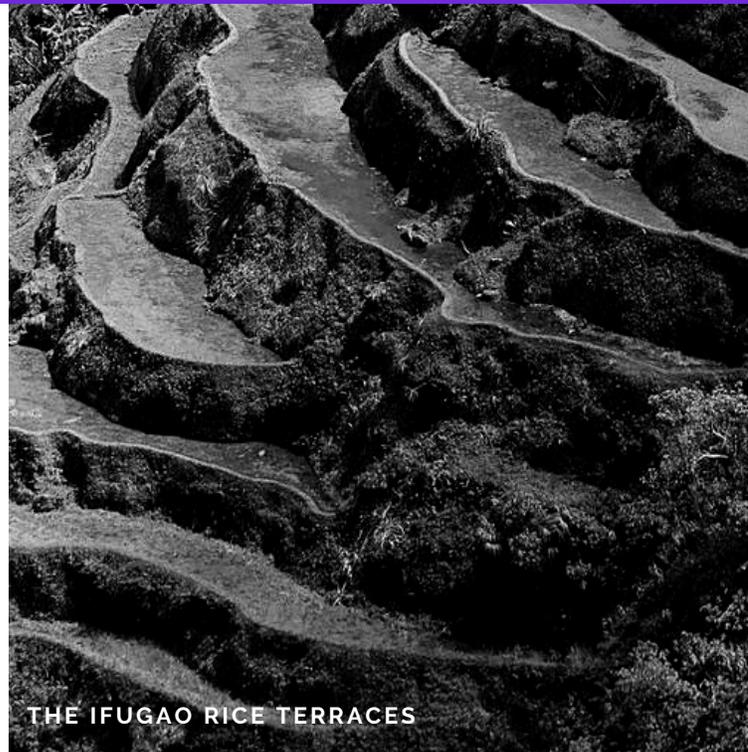
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHILIPPINES

More than 100 million people in the Philippines reside in rural areas, and more than a third of them are living in poverty. Over 25% of people in the Philippines are poor. The poverty gap between rural and urban spaces are widening. Urban residents experiencing poverty are 13% compared to rural inhabitants where it is 36% much higher. Agriculture is the main source of income for rural people living in poverty. Most of them depend on subsistence farming and fishing for their livelihoods.

"GREAT CHALLENGES ARE PRESENTED WHEN WESTERNIZED AND MODERN PRACTICES OVERTHROW INDIGENOUS ONES."

Indigenous people of the Philippines are generally living in highly fragile and vulnerable ecosystems in the uplands and highlands of Mindanao and the Cordilleras. These areas specifically Mindanao Island are disaster-prone coastal areas where farmers and fishers livelihood get compromised habitually.



THE IFUGAO RICE TERRACES

Pluralistic societies like the Philippines try to preserve indigenous culture and practices but great challenges are presented when westernized and modern practices overthrow indigenous ones. Because Indigenous people of the Philippines hold an urban indigenous stance in society, modern practices and systems cannot be avoided but it depends on future generations on how they preserve indigenous culture specifically indigenous farming and fishing practices.



NORTHERN MINDANAO COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROJECT

REACHING THE POOREST THROUGH
THE POVERTY ALLEVIATION FUND (PAF)



FISH FARMING COMMUNITY ON ONE
OF THE COASTAL LINES

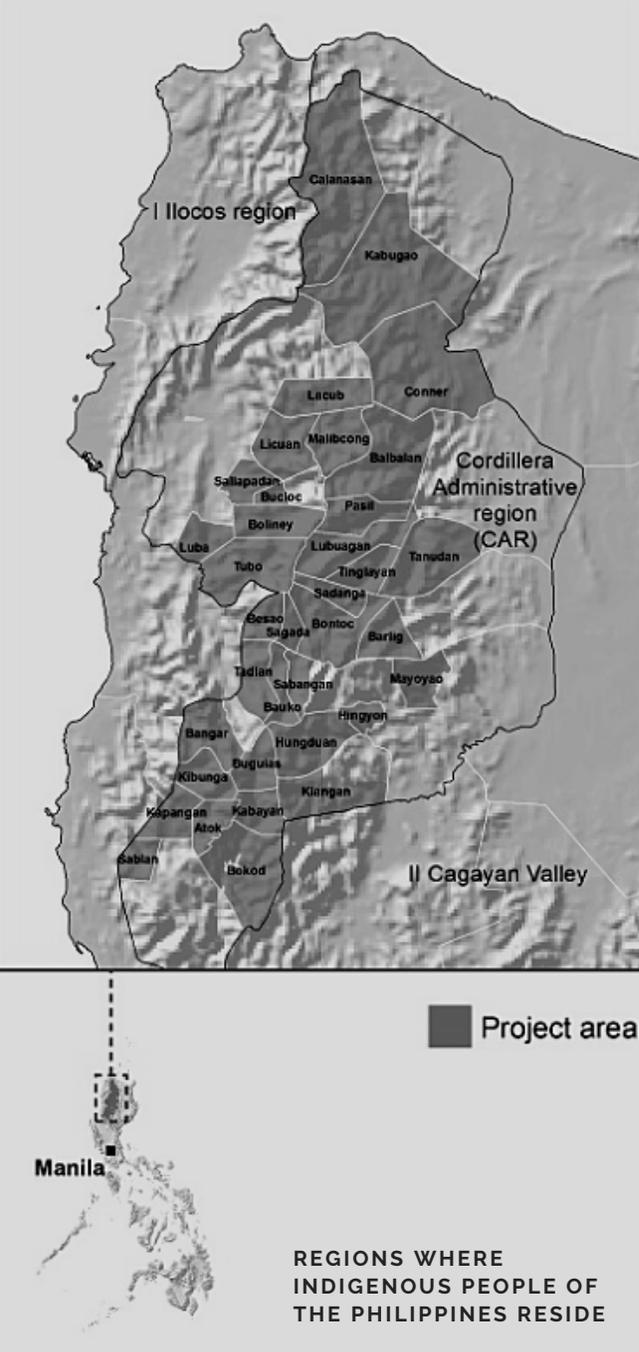
IFAD's Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment supported Northern Mindanao Community Initiatives and Resource Management Project (NMCIREMP), implemented by the Department of Agrarian Reform in the Caraga and Northern Mindanao regions of the Philippines. The objective of NMCIREMP was to reduce the vulnerability of the targeted households (indigenous peoples, coastal and lake fishers, agrarian reform beneficiaries and upland farmers) in the project area and enhance food security especially for rural Filipinas. 230 barangays (villages) located in 44 municipalities in six provinces in northern and north-eastern Mindanao, Philippines were being served. NMCIREMP creatively utilized the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) to increase the groups' stated previously access to government services, improve their self-esteem and social capital while steering away from the dependency mentality.

According to IFAD's experience in scaling up in Asia and the Pacific region written by Thapa and Hessel (2018), PAF directly benefited 17, 032 poor self-help group member households and increased their income from PHP 266 (\$25. 85) in 2004 to PHP 1, 651 (\$35. 46) in 2009. One of the voices of women in PAF-supported self-help groups who was part of "Women" Partners in Weaving Fabrics of Development:

"We started with PHP 40,000 at PHP 2,000 per household and we were 20 in all. Now we have 17 hectares on lease to our group for 12 years, planted with coconut-bearing trees. We harvest quarterly and have bought our own 3 hectares planted with young falcatta trees. We planted corn and sweet potato in between rows of these trees and now our incomes are secured and stable."

THE VALUE OF INDIGENOUS FARMING SYSTEMS

CHANGES OF GENDER DYNAMICS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHILIPPINES



IFAD's strategy aligned with supporting sustainable natural resource management backs the currently ongoing Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management project (CHARMP), which aims to increase the household income of farmers living in poverty through sustainable agricultural development and increasing quality of life. This project focuses on the value of indigenous farming systems, which are environmentally sustainable. Another is to identify and document the best indigenous practices and apply it to current systems at work. Lastly, it popularizes agricultural and agribusiness development, and income-generating activities like selling indigenous made products.

"Gender comes into play when analyzing who does the work in producing the product and who are leading the initiatives. A fair share of challenges surface up but gender stereotypes is the most prominent. Filipinas and Indigenous women are typically assigned to weave, while Filipinos and Indigenous men traditionally worked in the fields and at sea."

IFAD supports another project, ConVERGE, where farmers, rural youth, indigenous peoples and women have become greatly productive and competitive entrepreneurs in agriculture. A successful cooperative, NMCIREMP, has 278 members that identify as women and make up 70% of its leadership and financial assets of \$600,000.

Certain cases come up where empowered Filipinas and Indigenous women with dignified work and fair wages has led to conflict in some rural villages where Filipinos and Indigenous men are not used to earning less than them.

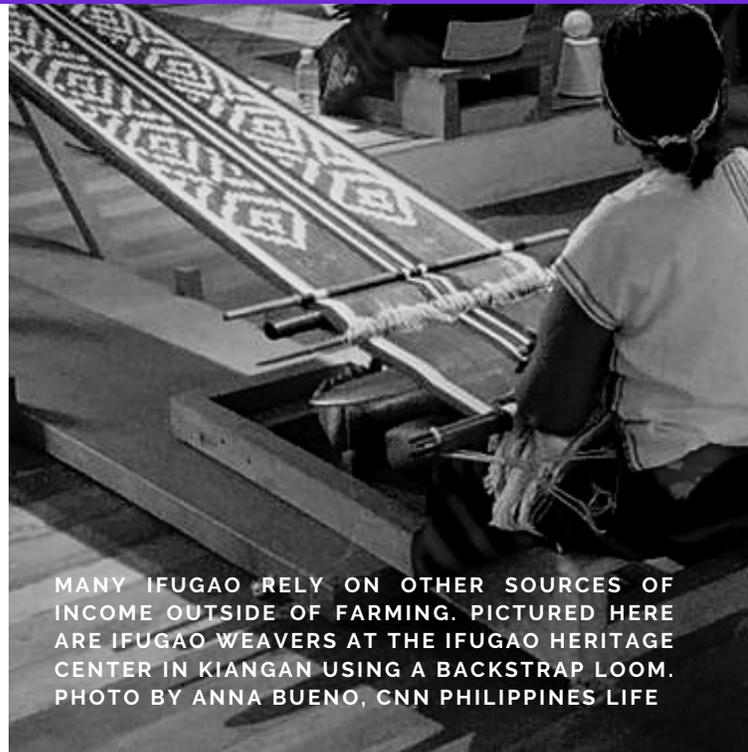
Despite gender roles being influenced by westernized and euro-normative gender beliefs, a collective resistance constantly forms by uplifting indigenous practices whether through farming, entrepreneurship, and preservation of the knowledge of the Babaylan.

A CALL FOR A DEEPER ANALYSIS

COMMERCIALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LABOR AND HANDMADE PRODUCTS

Even though IFAD, CHARMP, NMCIREMP, and additional projects focus on strengthening new forms of innovation like the commercialization of Indigenous people's products through market linkages and value chain development, does this actually provide sustainable socio and economic opportunities for them or exploit their culture?

There is no doubt that rural Filipinos/Filipinas and Indigenous people of the Philippines need another source generating income besides farming; however, many businesses acting as market linkages take advantage of their labor. I would suggest IFAD Philippines director, Alessandro Marini, and IFAD Philippines programme officer, Jerry E. Pacturan, keep an eye out for exploitation of labor and commerce especially on a transnational level.



MANY IFUGAO RELY ON OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME OUTSIDE OF FARMING. PICTURED HERE ARE IFUGAO WEAVERS AT THE IFUGAO HERITAGE CENTER IN KIANGAN USING A BACKSTRAP LOOM. PHOTO BY ANNA BUENO, CNN PHILIPPINES LIFE

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TERMS TO KNOW

- **Lola:** It means grandmother in Tagalog and Hiligaynon (Philippines Languages)
- **Filipina:** The colonial feminine gender representation
- **Filipino:** The colonial masculine gender representation
- **Babaylan:** A pre-colonial indigenous term indicating a third gender and non-binary

