



## Enabling the Cultural Heritage Management Practices of the Indigenous Peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines

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### ABSTRACT

This research is focused on the documentation of cultural practices, social and natural resources, conservation practices, cultural legacy, and self-worth of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati as indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines. It also documented the plausible plans and policies for natural and cultural resources conservation and heritage management. A qualitative research design was used to study the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples. Purposive sampling through the set inclusion and exclusion criteria was used in interviewing the nine informants using the three-generation test as a form of data validation. Informed consent was executed in observance of the research ethics. Results showed that the cultural practices and traditions gave the indigenous peoples the distinction of a cultural community. Their heritage management mirrors their way of life through the years. The only way of conserving their culture and traditions is by passing them on to their children through word of mouth and daily practice. The indigenous peoples have instilled in their children to adopt good and beneficial cultural practices and values that maintain their identity and self-worth as a community. For them, their community represents their core. The heart of their culture and identity is found in the home. The narratives of the explicit and tacit knowledge of the indigenous peoples call for the protection and participatory efforts of the multiple stakeholders who may serve as the strong key players in the passing of the unique culture to the next generations while embracing modernity and industrialization.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is known as the culturally diverse country in Asia where there is an estimated 10-20% of indigenous peoples comprised the 2022 total population of 102.9 million. United Nations Development Programme [1] reported that these indigenous peoples belong to the 112 ethnolinguistic groups mainly concentrated in Northern Luzon (33%) and Mindanao (61%) and with some other groups from Visayas.

The indigenous peoples in the Philippines serve as the bearers of the country's aboriginal identity. Cultures and traditions bring every individual to know and understand their distinct cultural identity. Cut off from people's race's lore, these individuals will be constrained to steal from other cultures or to create their own myths to contrive the illusion of being rooted in something or being a part of a larger whole. Bicular [2] stated that the loss of documenting and recording the indigenous people's culture and tradition is of national and international concern and has become a concern of the state and the educational system.

Social change, however, brought by modernity and globalization, drastically altered the normal functioning of

the indigenous people's culture, tradition, and heritage as parts of their indigenous knowledge system and practices (IKSP). The advancement in technology and rapid urbanization significantly threatened the existence of indigenous peoples' cultural heritage as they are now relegated to the margin in favor of worldviews and practices that support consumerism and the mass production of goods and services.

Western Visayas, Philippines, is no exception to these changes brought by urbanization. The provinces cater to the indigenous communities in Capiz, Iloilo, Aklan, Antique, and Guimaras. The hinterlands of the towns in each province are identified as the abode of the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities. The Ati are a group of indigenous peoples with dark skin, kinky hair, rounded eyes, and shorter height. They use *inatè* as their archaic language. The Panay Bukidnon, on the other hand, have a fair skin complexion, straight black hair, and dark chestnut eyes, and are also shorter in height. They use *kiniray-a* as their archaic indigenous language. These communities are rich in culture, traditions, and knowledge systems that must be documented. However, this cultural heritage is left in oblivion with the

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young generation's preference for anything foreign and popular. Bicular [2] reiterated that instead of reaching sustained culture in the 21st century through the mainstream of Filipino urban culture remained vegetated in the mountains and fermented in the basements of the cities.

*Paranublion* is an indigenous language term, specifically from the tribe of indigenous peoples in Western Visayas which means heritage. The tangible and intangible documentation of this *paranublion* or heritage is an initiative towards the progress and development of all cultural communities in the region. Documentation of this heritage is a platform for preserving and conserving the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities' lives, culture, and traditions towards sustained socio-cultural and inclusive economic development and resiliency.

The discussion of this study is focused on the salient points of the documentation of the indigenous peoples' cultural practices, social and natural resources, conservation practices, cultural legacy, and self-worth. Moreover, it documented the plausible plans/policies for natural and cultural resources conservation and heritage management of the indigenous peoples.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design was used in this study on the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines. This research design stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, focusing on the emergent and purposeful situations as they unfold naturally [3]. In this approach, the subject would accept adapting inquiry as their understanding deepens on the reality of the situation. Cases for studies as individuals or communities are selected because they create rich and illuminative information [4] such as the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines.

### 2.2. Research Informants

Every province in the Western Visayas caters to the indigenous peoples' community. However, this study is limited only to the indigenous peoples in Capiz and Antique who have responded to the request to be the research's subject area. The Panay Bukidnon in Ganzon, Jamindan, Capiz, and the Ati in Igalawagan, Tobias Fornier, Antique, were the two cultural communities covered in this study. The former is located in the most hinterland area of Capiz, while the latter is in hilly terrain amidst rivers and contoured upland rice terraces.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the nine (9) informants through the three (3) generation test [5]. The three oldest members of the communities were identified through the coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) regional and field offices in Iloilo, Capiz, and Antique. The other six (6) were identified

upon the referral of the older generations whom they have passed on their indigenous knowledge systems. The researcher has profiled the informants as PB1 (75 years old; female), PB2 (54 years old; female), PB3 (62 years old; male), and PB4 (68 years old; male) to represent the Panay Bukidnon. AT1 (64 years old; male), AT2 (42 years old; male), AT3 (83 years old; male), AT4 (60 years old; female), and AT5 (56 years old; female) on the other hand represented the Ati community. All of them were married. The informants were carefully identified based on the in-depth knowledge on their culture and practices which they gained as they aged in the tribe. Moreover, the informed consent form was executed upon issuing the permit and information the NCIP Office Region VI granted. The informants agreed and signed the said form before conducting the interviews. Ethical considerations for social science research were fully observed during the conduct of this study.



Fig. 1. Map of Capiz and Antique (in red) in Western Visayas, Philippines.

### 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews, observation, and participatory approach were employed through the conduct of informal and semi-structured interview sessions with the informants. This method substantiated and triangulated the data gathered from the informants.

The data gathered from the informants were transcribed verbatimly. A general inductive approach [6] was used to make sense of the data transcripts (See figure 2). Thematic analysis was used in extracting the emerging codes and concepts. In vivo coding [7] was used since folk or indigenous terms are participant-generated words from members of a particular culture, subculture, or microculture. Folk terms extracted indicate the existence of the group's cultural categories [8]. The codes refer to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, "the terms used by [participants] themselves" [9].

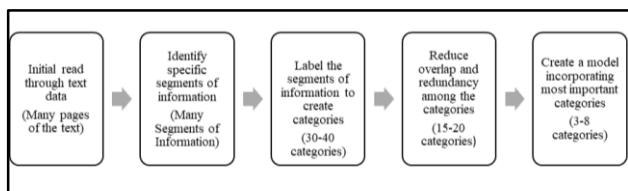


Fig. 2. Procedure in the general inductive approach.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Culture and identity reflect the lives of people converging in a community. In the case of the indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, various concerns confronted their cultural communities, which may either enhance or challenge their natural and cultural resources conservation and heritage management practices.

Unearthing the cultural community stories of the indigenous peoples of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati put a premium on privileging their voices. This allows one to understand the depth and breadth of their rich indigenous cultural fabric. Listening before telling allowed the indigenous peoples to realize their responsible sense of ownership over their lives as an artistic, cultural community. It may pave the way for them through the informed choices available to be empowered and emancipated to conserve and manage natural and cultural resources and heritage.

#### 3.1. Cultural Practices

The Panay Bukidnon and Ati elders have observed gradual changes in their cultural community. Technology has made an impact on their way of life. The presence of electricity after the onslaughts of Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in 2013 paved the way for electric power installation. The presence of television, cable satellites, and cellular phones exposed them to the convenience of modern life. Concrete roads were gradually constructed, reducing travel time from the town proper to the barangay. They have easy access to the market to sell their crops and other produce. The public elementary school was converted into an integrated school to provide opportunities for both Panay Bukidnon and Ati children to receive a quality education in their respective community.

**3.1.1. Language.** Archaic *Kiniray-a*, or the Panay Bukidnon's distinct traditional language, is still being used and passed on to the next generation. This unique language of the Panay Bukidnon is used during the chanting of the elders, who tell their *sugidanon* or stories using the *ligbok*, their distinct intonation. The *sugidanon* is a long narrative stories, particularly depicting the conquests of mythical people and the epics of the Panay Bukidnon. On the other hand, the *inatè*, the traditional language of Ati, is used only by most elders. Both tribes give importance to preserving their traditional language, making them distinct in their own way. However, the use of the traditional language for both tribes poses a challenge as its popularity tends to dwindle

among the youth. To address this concern, the cultural community has decided to integrate the use of archaic *kiniray-a* during the community and school-related special celebrations of the Panay Bukidnon. Likewise, with the teaching of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education at the elementary level, they felt the need for *kiniray-a* to be taught and considered their mother tongue. However, this remains unresolved with the absence of teachers in formal schooling who can fluently teach *kiniray-a*. In the case of the Ati, their language is almost dying. Like the case of the Panay Bukidnon, the Ati tribe does not have the venue to institutionalize the passing on of their traditional language to the youth. Its integration into the formal school system is not possible because of the lack of teachers who were capacitated to teach and even speak the language. The only venue of language acquisition among the youth is from their Ati parents – when they converse at home.

As narrated by the Ati informant, “we only use our language (*inatè*) when we talk to each other at home. As much as we would like to preserve our language, no one would use it when our children are in school. The teachers in school do not even know how to speak our language.” (Translated from the *inatè* language.)

**3.1.2. Livelihood.** Farming remains a significant livelihood with the adoption of some modern ways of growing crops among the Panay Bukidnon while the Ati still practices traditional hunting or locally known as *pangangasô*. The rearing of livestock is almost negligible. Panay Bukidnon women have the skills of weaving mats, baskets, purses, and bracelets using the vines of *nito*. *Nito* (*Lygodium circinnatum*) is a vineyard herbaceous plant that is widely available in the forested areas of the community. The women among the Ati also make mats and other handicrafts such as decorative glass holders and trays made from *nito*. In addition, the women of Ati are also making or producing some amulets, in which they used different herbals as the components together with the limestones sealed in a pouch. They sealed it with the prayer that the gods will protect whoever will wear these amulets from misfortunes and accidents.

Weaving and making of amulets were considered their alternative livelihood. The finished products were sold to the municipal public market and, in some regions, whenever orders were made through a middleman.

With the abundance of abaca (*Musa textilis*) among the Panay Bukidnon community, abaca fiber processing has the potential market with the presence of a donated weaving machine from the local government unit. Abaca is then combined with silkworm to develop a unique textile. The silkworm is being purchased in Aklan. To sustain the production, the Barangay Council proposed the establishment of an abaca fiber processing center. They look forward to more support from the local government, government agencies, National Government Organizations, and other probable stakeholders in the processing and

commercializing of their abaca-based products. Above all these, cultural practices inherited from their ancestors remained intact. Both the Panay Bukidnon and the Ati tribes are keen on ways to preserve the authenticity of their rules. With the influence of Christianity, both the Panay Bukidnon and Ati were mostly Pentecostal, Baptist, and Roman Catholic. Hence, an annual barangay and religious fiesta are being celebrated.

**3.1.3. Tradition.** One of the practices that the Panay Bukidnon regularly performs during harvesting is the *hil-o hil-o*. It is harvesting rice or any other crops with the help of most of the community members. It promotes unity and cooperation, which is inherent in Filipino culture. After harvesting, the whole family will have lunch or dinner while serving food from the harvested crops. It is called *hil-oanay*. It is vital to their tradition, which is strictly practiced. The importance of cohesiveness as a family is reflected in this tradition. Nobody should be left out in times of triumph.

**Table 1. Themes extracted on the cultural practices of the indigenous people**

Cultural Practices	Importance and Purpose	Indigenous Peoples	
		Panay Bukidnon	Ati
Use of the Traditional language	Makes them distinct and gives them the identity	archaic <i>kiniray-a</i>	<i>inatè</i>
Traditional farming Practices	Farming has been the main source of their livelihood	Traditional crops and vegetable farming	<i>Pangangaso</i> or hunting
Skills in weaving and other handicrafts	Alternative sources of livelihood	Mats, purses, and abaca for textiles	Making of amulets
Hil-o hil-o	For cohesiveness among the family ties	celebration	nomadic

This is the essence of *hil-oanay*. On the part of the Ati, they do not have a label on this kind of cultural practice though it can be observed that they also give importance to the oneness and togetherness of each family member, especially during the harvesting of their crops. However, it is inherent in their culture that they have to get out of their community once a year and immerse with the other people in the urban areas to ask for some alms. This culture makes them nomadic, which the government does not want them to be.

To the Panay Bukidnon and Ati in the Western Visayas part of the Philippines, their cultural practices and traditions, such as singing and dancing, skills in weaving, and the use of their traditional language, traditional farming, and harvesting practices, gave them that distinction as people – as a cultural community. It mirrors their way of life and how

they managed to survive through the years. Their cultural practices generally influenced their families to remain united. They gave high value to their culture and quality education because they believe their children deserve to be successful in life as they carry the rich cultural fabric of being a Panay Bukidnon to the next generation. This, for them, may ensure the sustainability of conserving their cultural practices.

The future of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati cultures will be challenged since the younger generations are now exposed to life outside the community. The presence of technology makes it more complicated. The importance of emphasizing to the younger generation the value of preserving cultural practices even in modern times is deemed necessary.

### 3.2. Social Resources

Social resources can be tangible and intangible, ascribed or built by an individual or the community. The tangible social resources may include money, personal property, information, goods, and services. On the other hand, intangible forms of social resources may refer to love, affection, and one's status within the society or community [10]. The indigenous peoples under this study lack some of these social resources, making them not considered healthy or sustainable communities.

#### 3.2.1 Panay Bukidnon Community

Social structures and services in the Panay Bukidnon cultural community in Ganzon are an integrated school, a barangay hall, and an improvised basketball court. The community lacks a health center which is essential in catering to the health concerns of the people due to the remote distance to the nearest rural health unit in the town proper. Ganzon is the farthest barangay of Jamindan, bordering the upland portion of Libacao, Aklan, and San Remegio, Antique. Two hundred households are found in the cultural community within the six sitios. The number of families gradually increases through the years. Pentecost, Baptist, and Roman Catholic are the predominant religious groups found in the community. The barangay is solely home to the Panay Bukidnon, with a few non-members of the cultural community who resided in the area due to marriage. A female-headed families are about 50 households.

During planting season, most of the agricultural work are carried out by men, while women help harvest and dry the crops. During the off-season, men focused on abaca processing while women found weaving baskets, coin purses, and other home decors as an alternative livelihood. Likewise, engaging or selling goods in mini-stores may also be their source of income. Climate change was identified as the reason for adjusting their additional activities for farming and other natural resources.

### 3.2.2. Ati Community

The Ati community is located on the mountaintop in Igalawagan, Tobias Fornier, Antique of Western Visayas. There are over a hundred and eighty-two (182) members of the Ati in this area or community. In this area, the only social structure of the community is their playground. Schools are located in the lowlands about five kilometers from their community. Both the Ati and their children have to wait for the low tide and cross the river to reach the plain where the nearby barangay hosts the elementary school. One of the elders narrated that during typhoon Haiyan, they could not avail of food, financial, and even health care assistance from the government because they can hardly be reached in their area due to the hardships of crossing the river. This led them to depend on their own resources to feed them during the calamity.

**Table 2. Themes extracted on the availability of social resources of the indigenous people**

Social Resources	Indigenous Peoples	
	Panay Bukidnon	Ati
School	available	not available
Barangay Hall	available	not available
Recreational Resource	improvised basketball court	vacant land as playground
Human Resources	200 households	over 182 community members

Moreover, most children are sick because they could not avail the local government's health care services. Traditional alternative medicines such as herbs and other medicinal plants are the remedies the parents apply whenever their children get sick.

### 3.3 Natural Resources

Corn is considered the primary produce of the Ati and Panay Bukidnon communities. The upland areas are mostly covered with cornfields. Root crops like sweet potato and cassava are abundant. Upland rice farming is considered widely practiced; however, its production is not enough to sustain the community's consumption. Livestock raising is minimal. There is a potable water source from springs, rivers, and deep wells. The community water system is still being repaired and reconnected since some pipes were cut off due to road widening and the construction of new school buildings. The road widening serves as a symbol of development and modernization which fuels urbanization that eventually sacrifices the natural water resources of the indigenous communities [11].

There is equal access to land among the Panay Bukidnon regardless of sex and socio-economic status. The ground is covered by the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Rights

Act (IPRA) regarding the ancestral domain. Some portions of the community, especially in peripheral areas, are contested by landowners other than the cultural community members. However, the Ati in the subject area does not have the same fate as the Panay Bukidnon. Private individuals or capitalists from the lowland owned the land they occupied. The government identified their area as their relocation site, though, for the older generations, it was part of their ancestral domains. The Ati become the tenants of the farms near their community.

August to October is considered the time of the year when food is scarce. The busiest months of the year fall from November to March. These patterns may sometimes vary depending on the occurrence of natural calamities such as typhoons, El Nino, and La Nina. Farming as their way of life, the indigenous community may adopt the smart method of farming in consideration of the climate change [12].

### 3.4 Conservation Practices

According to the elder members of the Panay Bukidnon and Ati cultural communities, they know their rights as indigenous peoples, such as their ancestral domains as stipulated in the IPRA (Indigenous Peoples Rights Act 1997 popularly known as Republic Act No. 8371 of 1997). Ancestral domains are comprised of lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and other natural resources under the ownership of the indigenous peoples, either individually or communal, since time immemorial, that were passed on by their ancestors (Chapter 2, RA 8371 of 1997). Conflict occurs when non-members of the cultural community claim their rights to some portions within or in the peripherals of their land. This contention by outsiders was based on the premise that as prominent families over time, they claimed to have owned lands before the approval of the IPRA Law.

As to the preservation of cultural traditions, rituals, and laws, they believe there are no concrete strategies and schemes that they follow to document on their own both the tacit and explicit knowledge of the Panay Bukidnon. This implicit and explicit knowledge revolves around their cultural practices, encompassing their laws, rituals, and traditions.

As to their cultural practices, the only way of conservation they do is by passing it on to their children through word of mouth and daily practice. These, however, are threatened by the gradual lack of interest and diversion of interest to other practices outside the cultural community. This could be attributed to the presence of modern technology to which the younger generations are aptly exposed.

As a unique way of protecting natural resources, the elders and the men and women sectors of the Panay Bukidnon proposed to the barangay council that the strategic areas within the community should be allocated for abaca plantations. This is in response to the growing potential of abaca textile production. Demands from local and

international markets may further be established. On the other hand, the Ati had filed the reclamation of their land with the help of the NCIP (National Commission for the Indigenous Peoples) Office in the region. According to one of the elder informants, it's been over a decade since they had filed the case to the government, but until now, there's no movement on their petitions.

Various stakeholders' support may serve as a means to protect their natural and cultural resources and heritage. The cultural community, in unison, has high hopes that the local government will further stretch its arms to bring forth essential social services to Panay Bukidnon and Ati people. Likewise, they look forward that as a cultural community, they will be able to properly document and protect their cultural traditions and practices. Other than concerning institutions or individuals doing it for them, they felt the need to do it themselves. The elders wanted to emphasize the need to inculcate in younger generations a strong sense of responsibility and ownership to protect further and promote their rich natural and cultural heritage. The elders believed this initiative would be attained in time with the growing number of indigenous peoples' children receiving formal education. The conservation practices of the indigenous peoples' communities on their folklore and other cultural traditions should have been the way of life of the locals and may transfer the complexity of these practices to their children [13].

### 3.5 Heritage Management

As a form of heritage management, the elders and the barangay council have claimed they lack efforts in this aspect. The local government unit is pooling its resources regarding road construction and other social services. Non-government organizations assisted with rehabilitation after the devastation of Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in November 2013. The National Commission for Culture and the Arts, with the provincial tourism and cultural affairs offices of each LGU, initiated local, national, and international programs to showcase the Panay Bukidnon and Ati's cultural heritage in events like Dayaw Cultural Festival. The Dayaw Festival originated from the indigenous concept of dayaw, which means to be proud of one's culture and identity. This event showcases both the material and material culture, traditions, and practices of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines held in the month of October, along with the celebration of Indigenous Peoples Month worldwide.

However, they claimed that heritage management remains a considerable challenge to specific strategies and schemes in the community context. It was pointed out that no organization has given financial assistance and training to the indigenous peoples' cultural communities for natural and cultural conservation and heritage management. Likewise, it was claimed that no evidence was documented to support efforts to conserve cultural heritage. If there were,

researchers and organizations conducting fieldwork and immersion in the community would not have furnished them with their outputs.

The tribal leader, elders, barangay captain, barangay council, and constituents make essential decisions for the cultural community. The elders consider participatory ways of deliberating concerns affecting them. Planning activities utilizes both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The tribal leader and the barangay captain of each tribe call for a meeting as the need arises. Information is well-disseminated so that every sector or cultural community member will be aware. Thus, they may signify their intention to attend the meetings and all other activities.

### 3.6 Cultural Legacy and Self-Worth

Composed of closely knitted families, the Panay Bukidnon beams with pride that their cultural community is still practicing their unique culture and traditions. Their families serve as a strong bond for them to be assured that the cultural legacy of the Panay Bukidnon will live on and transcend across generations.

The tribal leader narrated that he was one of those pioneers who advocated and supported the cause for their cultural community to be recognized in the whole country as Panay Bukidnon and not any other name. He said it was a tedious process, but it paid off, and the province's cultural communities were given due recognition.

A middle-aged barangay council member emphasized that times have changed and modernization may take over their community. Still, their culture and identity as Panay Bukidnon remain intact. There might be external influences that will somehow challenge their practices. This, however, may be countered by their strong will to remain faithful to their culture. Through the years, they have remained resilient and hardworking. They wanted their children to carry with them the same disposition towards life. This narrative is strengthened with the claim that one must have a deep understanding of culture and history influenced by the environment, social relations, personal experience, and knowledge on one's roots [14].

The Panay Bukidnon women consider themselves survivors of many difficulties in life. This trait may have been inherited from their ancestors who practiced the *binukot*. *Binukot* is a woman who has been kept at home or in her room to preserve her as the bearer of their culture, traditions, and practices, including oral traditions such as the chants and songs that tell their tales as an indigenous tribe. As *binukot*, she is not allowed that her feet would reach to the ground to preserve her sacredness as a "well-kept-woman." An elder woman recalls that the location of their community might be remote from the town proper, crossing several mountains and rivers to reach it, but they never considered leaving. Women are responsible for nurturing younger generations by inculcating what it is to be a Panay Bukidnon.

Like the Panay Bukidnon, the Ati also is composed of knitted family ties. This is shown in their close relationship with their kin by living together under one roof. The men of Ati bring with them their male children whenever they go farming or hunting. This practice serves as an apprenticeship for the younger men to inherit their culture as stewards of the forests. The chieftain of the Ati community in Antique disclosed that they have experienced being isolated and discriminated against by society because of their skin color and cultural practices. This triggered him along with his tribesmen to be more participative in every activity of the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in coordination with the NCIP Office in the region. They also send their children to school to acquire knowledge and education to have better work opportunities with the hope that may uplift their way of living. However, the Ati parents have instilled in their children to adopt the good and beneficial cultural practices and values which maintain their identity and self-worth as indigenous peoples. For them, their community represents their core. The heart of their culture and identity is found in the home. Community participation is crucial in the conservation of the traditional wisdom; hence the elders should diffuse this heritage to the youth for sustaining their culture [15].

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The Panay Bukidnon and Ati, as indigenous peoples in Western Visayas, Philippines, have a unique way of life, rich cultural beliefs, and heritage management practices that recognize them with a distinct identity. Their knowledge systems are the core values of Filipinos who have unique identities and cultures. The documentation of these cultures is a means of preservation and conservation of the unique, but dying Filipino aboriginal identity due to the presence of modernization and technologies. While the indigenous peoples exert their efforts in managing their culture and heritage, they also need the understanding and acceptance of those who are outside of norms and kind. The narratives of the explicit and tacit knowledge of the indigenous peoples call for the protection and participatory efforts of the multiple stakeholders who may serve as the strong key players in the passing of the unique culture to the next generations while embracing modernity and industrialization. Moreover, the government may implement programs and projects that attend to the needs of these indigenous peoples in building economically sustainable and culturally sustained communities.

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