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Harnessing Traditional Knowledge for Development and Trade: The Bicol (Phils.) Experience

Prepared by

Jocelyn L.B. Blanco

Department of Trade and Industry

Philippines

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**The Philippines: HARNESSING TRADITIONAL
KNOWLEDGE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND TRADE**

**Engr. Jocelyn L.B. Blanco, Regional Director,
Department of Trade and Industry
Region 5, Legaspi City (Philippines)**

Introduction:

The Philippines, being home to some 126 ethnolinguistic groups, possesses varied traditional knowledge that still influenced the lives modern and mainstream Filipinos of today. As presented during the 1999 roundtable on Intellectual Property and Traditional Knowledge, Filipino traditional knowledge are identified mostly on health care, agriculture, forestry systems, mining, arts and crafts, and on music, dances and literature. The best landmark of these traditional knowledge is the world-renowned Rice Terraces of the Ifugaos. Indigenous knowledge systems and practices work well for the efficient management and preservation of the ecosystem necessary for sustainable development.

The emergence of the awareness to protect traditional knowledge came about with the new economic forces and development at the turn of the Twentieth Century. Massive logging and large-scale mining are among the many activities that caused the displacements of indigenous peoples out of the ancestral domains. These and other occurrences has effectively reduced the existence of indigenous knowledge of many indigenous communities.

In response, pertinent provisions in the 1987 Philippine Constitution were incorporated, specifically Section 17 of Article XIV, which provides that:

“The State shall recognize, respect and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions. It shall consider these rights in the formulation of national plans and policies.”

The passage of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, RA 8371, on 29 October 1997 realized this constitutional mandate. This law recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to their ancestral domains and lands, to self governance and empowerment, to self justice and human rights and to cultural integrity. The law also enunciated protection to the community intellectual property rights, to religious, cultural sites and ceremonies, to indigenous knowledge and practices and to biological resources.

TRADITIONAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

Particularly immersed and involved regularly in activities for developing and promoting this sector as a viable source of income for indigenous peoples and communities, the following traditional arts and crafts were presented to illustrate relevant experiences, and the programs being introduced to address the current needs.

□ Pottery

Pottery as an economic activity in the Philippines dates back to pre-Spanish era. Traditional processes involve the clay soil quarrying using traditional digging tools, transporting by the use of carabao-driven sled, solar drying for clay and open firing for pottery products, clay pulverizing using stone and wooden-made roller, and the use of potter's wheel for forming purposes. Early products range from simple and crude-finish pots, jars, toys to building materials such as decorative bricks. With competition, innovative products and processes developed that produce even quality ceramic products. This late, ceramics is one of the major export products of the country.

□ Cutlery

Early cutlery products ranges from long bolo & bladed weapons to simple and heavy cutting tools primarily for personal protection, hunting and household use. The “tabak” and “kampilan” are among the known primitive weapons. The forming process involve the heating of the steel to red hot before being hammered to desired shape. Surface finish is accomplished by rubbing with sand stone and a file before heat treatment is applied.

□ Jewelry

Jewelry making is one of the world's oldest industry. It uses many different materials or a combination thereof. The Philippines, owing to its abundance of gold and the better price its products command, uses gold as raw material. Skills are developed and transferred from one member of the family to the other, and continue to pass on from generation to generation.

Jewelry making in the country is primarily manual. Foremost among these “hand crafted” jewelry items is the Filigree, a delicate and intricate ornamental work/design of jewelry from gold.

The small scale mining sector of the country is one of the beneficiaries of the industry. Jewelers source-out raw materials not from the big mining firms but on this informal yet accessible sector. However small, this provides fair economic returns to its people without much destruction to the environment compared to commercial mining operation.

□ **Handloom Weaving Industry**

Handloom weaving industry thrive much in the eastern side part of southern Luzon, the Bicol Region, where the supply of abaca fiber is abundant. The region ranks second to the Visayas in terms of fiber production. However, Bicol is dubbed as “Handicrafts Country in the Philippines” because of its ability to produce quality products for local and export markets. Non-traditional exports in 1999 amounted to US \$40.161, of which around 86 % came from handicrafts.

Weave designs differs from one location to another that speaks of their individual ethnic origin.

These and other traditional crafts absorbed much of the employment surplus in the agricultural sector, primarily an agricultural country.

Government Support Programs:

The government, through the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), provided the following support programs primarily geared towards product competitiveness both in the local and export markets, with the resulting economic gains for the community.

Programs under trade & development includes product development, technology transfer, skills development, marketing, financing, project management and institutional development, and productivity programs; and, sustainability and resource regeneration.

Product Development Assistance:

A DTI attached agency, the Product Development and Design Center of the Philippines, is normally tapped to conduct design seminars and product development sessions for region-based clients on a regular basis. Product development activities in support of trade exhibitions and trade promotions are normally provided. While clients servicing for product development is a costly endeavor for the indigenous people to afford, these materialize through cost sharing with DTI.

Non-government institutions are also being tapped by DTI, one of which is the Association of Partners for Fair Trade, Inc. (APFTI). This institution is also giving free product development seminars and consultancy services, to identified fair trade practitioners. Aside from product development, APFTI provides sponsorship to trade fairs to those deserving clients.

On the local front, DTI V is now developing young and local designers to complement or reinforce designers pool regularly tapped and based outside the region. This project is being supported by state and private colleges and universities within Bicol through their industrial design departments. The initial batch has a total of 24 trainees. A continuous training program is being eyed to update them on latest trends in the field.

Technology Transfer:

Technology transfer is being accomplished through the introduction of new processes, employment of new production machinery and equipment. Benchmarking activities are conducted for this purpose.

Skills Development Program:

The implementation of skills development program is a two-pronged activity. One is to generate workers capable of being employed; and the other is to support the growing industries in the region.

The DTI strategies in training implementation:

- Utilize the agency's regular training funds.

- Networking with LGUs to avail training fund from the Development Fund.
- Prepare and endorse training proposals to Technical Education & Skills Development Authority, a vocational training institution of the government.
- Tap special funding sources, such as the DOLE – GATT Fund.

□ **Marketing Program:**

Various marketing programs are being undertaken by the Office to assist clients promote their products, establish market linkages, produce products appropriate with the times, expand and penetrate wider market.

Activities undertaken along this line are the conduct seminars on market opportunities and current trends, preparation and publication of directories and product profiles, and referrals to potential buyers. The most tangible among all marketing activities is the conduct and participation to trade fairs, both local and international, where sales are realized and the buyers invited by the Office. As a reference, DTI V clients have already generated PhP8.0 Million in sales as of Sept. 2000 from participating in the February 2000 National Trade Fair in Manila.

□ **Financing Program:**

Entrepreneurs requiring additional capitalization are assisted through the following:

- Bank referrals, including assistance on loan packaging.
- Investment matching, creating joint venture projects and partnerships.
- Direct loan assistance to indigenous communities, the non-bankable sector.

On direct loan assistance to indigenous communities, the Tulong Sa Tao – Self Employment & Livelihood Assistance (TST-SELA) and later renamed Non-Government Organization-Micro Credit Project (NGO-MCP), certain loan eligibility requirements for applicant non-government organizations are set. Management of loan funds from the funding institutions is transferred to DTI. The Office then channel the

fund to non-government organizations that met the eligibility requirements for relending to micro enterprises operating in the locality. Funding source of this project is the ADB with equity from the government.

Other financing programs adopting similar relending scheme are TST- Locally Funded (GAA Fund), and the MEDP –CDF of the Congressmen. However, these two have terminated early because of the government's budgetary and political constraints.

□ **Project Management and Institutional Development Programs:**

The common method of implementing these programs through the conduct of training and seminars.

The most current methodology in project management seminars is the Best Game, approach. Best Game stands for Business Expense and Saving Target Game. The process would subject the trainees on the actual business environment and experience, a game model.

□ **Productivity Programs:**

Productivity improvement program the DTI currently being pursued includes the following:

- Industry Clustering
- Adoption of 5 S of Good Housekeeping Practices
- Establishment of Area Productivity Council
- Establishment of Production and Training Centers

Industry clustering, as a productivity strategy, can be further classified according to: 1) geographic clustering, 2) sectoral clusters, and 3) clusters supporting line production/component parts assembly.

Geographic cluster is simply locating various industries in one geographic location or concentration.

Sectoral cluster is accomplished through the concentration of one industry in one area. Craft villages takes the form of sectoral cluster. Products could finished or assembly component.

Clusters for line production is achieved through consolidation of producers of an assembly parts necessary to produce one type of finished product. This is most apparent and practical on sub-contracting scheme.

Adoption of 5S of Good Housekeeping, as a productivity tool and approach, is implemented through training, benchmarking and auditing.

Area Productivity Council is being initiated primarily to resolve issues affecting exports at the local level, and as a channel in bringing-up to concerned agencies issues and concerns not within the control or jurisdiction of the council. In addition, the council initiate productivity programs for its members which is being supported by the Export Development Council.

The Ceramics Production Center in Tiwi, Albay is a support facility to the traditional craft of the community. The center offers equipment and machinery not affordable to individual worker. The center also function as training center and as production unit. Managed by the community organization, it is a big boast the production capacity of the people.

Another project is the jewelry training center in Camarines Norte. This project will address the shortage of jewelers in the region caused by migration and increased demand for the product. The center also introduces improved processes and techniques, and the employment of new equipment to improve the level of productivity and product quality.

Common service facilities for bamboo & rattan crafts are established in the province of Camarines Sur. Aside from the usual function, the facilities served to standardized product quality.

□ **Project for Immediate Implementation:**

In collaboration with other historico-cultural agencies, DTI shall embark on a project to document the rich tradition of the indigenous peoples in the region particularly, of their arts and crafts.

Sustainability projects includes production/regeneration of raw materials for handicrafts, bamboo and rattan crafts, and the opening up of “minahang bayan” or small scale mining sites for the jewelry industry.

Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts

The Philippines has, at this stage, instituted legal frameworks for the protection of traditional knowledge in the country. In existence is the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act recognizing the rights and welfare of indigenous peoples. It also recognizes the important role of the indigenous peoples in preserving ecological balance and biodiversity. The built-in protection mechanism under this law is the requirement for free and prior informed consent of the indigenous people on activities that may affect them.

In compliance with the requirements of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreements, the Philippines passed into law Republic Act No. 8293, or the Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines. Laws on Patent, Trademarks, Copyright and other economic rights were explicitly discussed.

There are, however, other legislative initiatives in congress which seeks to establish the Community Intellectual Rights Protection. The interesting provisions of this protection system is the establishment of the national registers on plant variety, indigenous cultural heritage, and on indigenous inventions, designs and utility models which includes arts and crafts and traditional practices. With these Registries, the Philippines can establish rightful claims over our traditional knowledge, institute the necessary sui generis protection system without going into the cumbersome, lengthy and expensive patent system.

The underlying objective of protecting traditional arts and crafts is economic. It provides the indigenous peoples and community the necessary income for daily subsistence. The government intervention of providing the innovative and sustainability program is to bring economic progress of this sector. The protection system by geographical indication or certificate of origin would suffice, as most countries have already their distinct product identities. The product identity has something to do with materials, design, and production processes involved. Sustainability of this economic activity anchored on the raw material requirement can be

addressed best through indigenous peoples ownership status of resources where they can adopt to conserve, regenerate or control its flow.

There are, however, some apprehensions on how the implementation and policy-making processes would evolve. On the implementation side, the failures of almost all programs are attributed first, on the capacity and capability of the implementers given the sincerity and adequate orientation, and secondly, on the beneficiaries point of view, receptiveness and involvement. The element of time is also very important, as protection is only necessary when and until there are still something to protect to. These issues are consequently pushed toward the policy making process, where the involvement of the affected sector at the very beginning of the planning process should be a basic requirement.