

# Indigenous Peoples Education: “From Alienation To Rootedness”

CONSOLIDATED REPORT BY  
THE EPISCOPAL COMMISSION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Instituted in 1972, the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) is the agency of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) working on the issues facing indigenous peoples in the country as they articulate and assert their aspirations, struggles, and rights as cultural communities. ECIP is also responsible for consolidating and coordinating the efforts of forty-five Indigenous Peoples’ Apostolates (IPAs), which are directly working with indigenous communities in the different dioceses in the country.

For the past thirty years, a major focus of ECIP has been the struggle of indigenous communities for their ancestral domains and human rights issues, and more recently, in the articulation and assertion for indigenous peoples’ education.

Education has always been an identified priority concern, with the Indigenous Peoples Apostolates (IPAs) formulating their own programs or interventions depending on the availability of resources and other considerations. These initial interventions, however, were very similar to those that have been done by religious congregations who have worked in some indigenous communities (in some cases, for decades) before the institutionalization of ECIP.

## **The indigenous peoples being served**

The Philippines is home to around one hundred ten indigenous peoples communities numbering between fifteen to twenty million. They are located in different parts of the country,

with more than sixty percent in the Mindanao island, around thirty percent in Luzon island, and less than ten percent in the islands of the Visayas region. While varying in ways of life and cultural heritage, they share similar experiences of discrimination and marginalization. In 1997, the Philippine government passed the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act or Republic Act 8371 that recognizes and protects the rights of indigenous communities. Its effective implementation, however, is still to be seen and asserted by indigenous communities. This is one arena of partnership with IPAs.

While there are no definite statistics and figures to give the accurate number of indigenous peoples communities reached by the public school system of the country, it is safe to say that schooling is still inaccessible to many of these communities. They are usually found in the mountainous areas of the country where basic social services like public schools and health centers are non-existent.

It is because of this absence of schools that various groups have been undertaking efforts

to provide education interventions in these communities.

**Interventions**

Before the 1980s the various forms of interventions done by IPAs and religious congregations were any or a combination of the following:

Spectrum of needs	Form of intervention
Basic literacy-numeracy	Teaching basic literacy-numeracy to children and adults based on mainstream approaches, methods and content
Periodic trainings (livelihood, health, etc.)	Provision of adult-based trainings based on mainstream approaches and content
Support to enter school	Provision of school supplies, scholarships, tutorials
Schools	Provision of infrastructure, personnel (usually lowlander), curriculum evaluation tools, books and school calendar based on mainstream education system

These interventions introduced by the religious congregations or IPAs especially during the first seven decades of the 20th century were based on its assessment of the situation of the communities. These efforts were heavily influenced by the colonial view that education should be used to ‘civilize’ or assimilate the inhabitants of the Philippine islands, with education (schooling to be more accurate) as the main civilizing process (McCoy, 2006).

Very common interventions were basic literacy-numeracy and scholarships. In the later years, the communities themselves started to request for education interventions because of

the following commonly cited reasons:

- The need to understand the system of transacting business in the marketplace (which were different from indigenous communities’ system of economic calculations and barter) because of the rampant cheating they experienced
- The need to read street signs, newspapers, and legal documents, and to vote and participate in activities outside their communities
- The need for other livelihood options because the community’s resource base (such as farmland) has been exploited by others (for logging, mining, plantations, etc); exploring other livelihood options means interacting with the enlarging national economy, thus the need for trainings to familiarize them with this arena; others found schooling necessary to be able to find employment
- The need to access health services, and
- Going to school is equated with being ‘educated’ and education means liberation from poverty.

**Modified interventions**

The last point above has been one of the dominant views about education in Philippine society and this viewpoint has also permeated indigenous communities who have encountered mainstream education for several decades. Graduates of indigenous communities were viewed as success stories both by the communities and the congregations or IPAs, and these graduates learned, **as individuals**, how to navigate their way in the wider social demands of mainstream society. The backdrop, however, of these few success stories was the reality of a much bigger number of drop-outs because of the following:

- Comprehension difficulties
- Adjustment difficulties
- Discrimination.

In response to these situations, some inter-

ventions were modified by contextualizing the content of the lessons (A for *atis* or *avocado*, instead of *apple*) and using non-formal methods to facilitate academic learning and achievement. There were also efforts in several dioceses to build dormitories exclusive for indigenous students studying in the towns to ease adjustment difficulties and lessen discriminatory experiences. The main goals, however, were still to inculcate mainstream competencies and learning processes to facilitate the assimilation of indigenous learners into mainstream society.

This mix of modified and mainstream education interventions went on for decades and is still the case in some dioceses and religious congregations today. It was only in the early 1990s that indigenous communities started to more vocally articulate misgivings to their IPA partners about their experiences with the mainstream education system. This moved IPAs in the country to once again examine and reflect why this is so, this time by widening their scope of analysis - reexamining the impact of education on indigenous communities and not just individuals, and seeing education from the viewpoint of the indigenous peoples themselves.

### **Process of consolidating indigenous peoples ideas and concerns**

Since 2002, IPAs took time to hold consultations focused on education at the community, diocesan and regional levels to gather their views. In these consultations, focused group discussions and key informant interviews were held.

The first ECIP National Consultation on IP Education held in 2002 became a venue for participating apostolates to appreciate their common experiences and to explore consolidated responses. It was also in this consultation that the recognition of the education system of indigenous peoples' was stressed, giving birth to the idea that perhaps ECIP could contribute to the

articulation of the indigenous education system of indigenous communities so that this could serve as a basis of educational interventions and programs that are being done by IPAs.

To evoke the views, experiences and insights of indigenous communities and apostolates nationwide, regional consultations were held in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao from 2004 to 2006, and these were consolidated in two ECIP National Conventions on IP Education held in 2006 and 2007.

### **The indigenous peoples experience of education**

The consolidated findings reveal that education has other dimensions in the indigenous peoples' experience:

- *School as a venue of discrimination*

Until today, discrimination persists as one of the traumatic experiences of indigenous students, with the school being a key venue of such experiences. Discrimination is being experienced in two ways: from people and from the education system itself. Reports about teachers who treat their indigenous students differently and with prejudice outnumber reports on teachers who are fair and open-minded. It is the same experience with classmates who also mirror the general discriminatory views of society. Since students who discriminate are most of the time not reprimanded or corrected, the situation is condoned and in effect, the discrimination of indigenous peoples is affirmed even if indirectly.

Another recently articulated dimension of discrimination relates to other aspects of school life. An example is the requirement of uniforms and shoes, things beyond the financial capacity of many indigenous communities. In the case of shoes, this is something that some indigenous children are not used to. Not wearing shoes became a mark of being an indigenous person and a source of discrimination.

Another example is the tendency to label indigenous students as slow learners just because it takes more time for them to learn the competencies associated with literacy. Students from communities whose communication and knowledge generation patterns are still very oral, it is natural that they take more time to adjust to a new system of communication and pattern of thinking. Orality as a system of communication and thinking has different dynamics from literacy (Ong, 1982). While orality nurtures linguistic intelligence, sharpens memory (voluntary, involuntary, iconic, implicit, semantic, symbolic, and musical) and associative thinking, among others (Revel, 2005), it has been given secondary attention in the contemporary education system (Ong, 1982). Unfortunately, instead of understanding the need of indigenous students for some degree of transition from one communication pattern to another, they are evaluated as slow learners.

- *Schooling as an experience of non-being*

Indigenous peoples who have gone to school recall how their way of life and the indigenous peoples in general were usually seen as backward and belonging to the past, and their knowledge and skills were discussed as inferior or invalid when compared to ‘modern’ knowledge and skills. When indigenous peoples’ life and being were discussed, there was a tendency to misrepresent or misinterpret them because of the prevailing prejudice. These experiences show the failure of the mainstream education system to address the indigenous community context.

- *Discussion limited to surface culture*

In cases where the ‘culture’ of indigenous peoples is included in the discussion, there is a tendency to highlight artifacts and practices (songs, clothes, etc.), such that the understanding of culture is limited to surface culture and the tribe is associated with things instead of

them being introduced as a people. This results in a shallow understanding of indigenous peoples as **people** and **culture as a process**, and indigenous peoples’ identity being limited to blood affiliation instead of including the cultural heritage and history of the community.

### **Impacts of mainstream school system**

These indelible experiences of indigenous students in the mainstream school system have the following impacts at the **individual level**:

The overall impact of mainstream education has been the *alienation of indigenous youth from their own communities, heritage, culture and history* and commonly manifested in the following:

*Broken intergenerational ties.* Learning from school that indigenous peoples’ ways are backward, indigenous youth consequently view elders as backward or inferior since they are the living memories of these life-ways. This is manifested in the youth’s disrespect and sometimes blatant disregard of the elders, resulting in broken intergenerational ties. Since schooled youth have been observed to be close-minded or distant, elders have also become silent, to the point that in some communities elders feel and accept that they have no place or have lost their roles in the community.

*Misuse and abuse of cultural practices, and dying indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSPs).* With broken intergenerational ties passing on of indigenous knowledge, culture and wisdom to the next generations becomes inadequate. Knowledge that took centuries to generate and validate have degenerated and/or are being forgotten to the point that today, when IKSPs are slowly gaining recognition, communities could not recall them anymore. The meaning of cultural practices becomes distorted and symbols are misused or desecrated when

the younger generations try to practice these without consulting the elders or the community.

*Demise of community reflection processes.* The indigenous peoples' move and work as a community and the oral nature of their communication patterns make reflection and decision-making a very communal, face-to-face act (Ong, 1982). With the breakdown of intergenerational ties and the focus on individual achievement, success and decision-making, community reflection processes like storytelling and gatherings of the community are not convened, resulting in fragmented views or half-baked understanding of situations. The latter disables the community's capacity to act on situations that confront them and disperses their energy to act together as a whole.

*Graduates or schooled youth leaving the community or abusing the ancestral domain.* Another painful experience of indigenous communities is the exodus of their schooled youth because of the imbibed view that working in the ancestral domain is inferior to working in semi-urban communities. For those who stay in the community, their loss of respect for the land as a cultural space tends to make them view the land only as an economic resource, thereby undertaking activities that are detrimental to the environment (like lowland slash and burn, illegal logging, etc.) just to increase their income. Such examples have motivated others in the community to do the same.

*Continued marginalization of communities.* With communities disabled from working as a vibrant whole, many indigenous communities remain marginalized despite having educated members. Individual success and growth of schooled indigenous peoples do not translate into community growth and empowerment.

*Dying spirit of the tribe.* As one elder put it, indigenous youth do not anymore have a sense of the spirit of the tribe—that

which binds and moves them as one and is the wellspring of the culture that they have given birth to through the centuries; that has guided them as a people to live in dignity. Along with the continued marginalization of indigenous communities is the dying of the spirit of the tribe and consequently, the dying of their culture.

### Assertion by the Elders

Given the individual and community impacts of mainstream education, indigenous community elders in different parts of the country express, though in different ways, the same assertion underpinned with apprehension for the future:

Their tribal and community life can only continue if their youth

- **are rooted in their culture, IKSPs and the ancestral domain,**
- **grow up with a clear sense of identity,**
- **are committed to meeting the challenges and issues that face the tribe,**
- **can assert their self-determination, and**
- **are conscious of being inheritors of a heritage and their elders for the coming generations.**

Foremost in their minds is the crucial issue of the ancestral domain. What will happen to the ancestral domains they are fighting for if the next generations do not accept this generational and historical legacy and take care of it accordingly? Elders reiterate that there are competencies needed by indigenous communities like literacy and numeracy that are learned from schools, but they envision school education without the adverse impacts and indigenous peoples' identity and self-determination constituting the central focus.

### Culturally-sensitive educational interventions

Realizing the need to address the adverse impact of mainstream education system on the indigenous communities, some IPAs and religious congregations started in the 1980s to introduce culturally-sensitive educational interventions. At present, more culturally-sensitive educational interventions have been introduced that are classified into:

#### • Indigenized formal education

In areas where there are established schools, culture-sensitive education within the national curricular framework required by the Department of Education takes many forms such as the following:

- Use of the local language when appropriate (as against the use of Filipino or English languages as the sole mediums of instruction)
- Discussion of concepts with local situations or examples (e.g., fermentation and wine-making, counting and simple weaving, etc.)
- Inclusion of local knowledge in the topics (e.g., local identification system of animals and plants, or land and water forms)
- Addition of underlying values like identity and self-determination
- Addition of local topics to particular subjects (e.g., indigenous musical instruments in music class aside from the usual instruments taught)
- Inclusion of elders or experts from the community as resource persons for some topics (e.g., for indigenous musical instruments or weaving).

This type of education is employed in the following areas:

- Primary level - Sta. Cruz Mission, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato; St. Francis Learning Center, Subic, Zambales; Diocese of

Tarlac

- Secondary level - Bauko Catholic School, Bauko, Mt. Province; Mangyan Mission, Oriental Mindoro; Sta. Cruz Mission, Lake Sebu, South Cotabato.

In the case of the Mangyan Mission in Oriental Mindoro, the schools superintendent allowed extra time for a subject focused on Mangyan culture (the Mangyans constitute a significant part of the population in the island of Mindoro) in the public primary schools in the Vicariate of Oriental Mindoro. Starting in school year 2007, the provincial government and local office of the Department of Education has become a partner in giving culture-sensitivity trainings to teachers stationed in Mangyan communities.

#### • Indigenized Alternative Learning Systems curriculum

The Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) of the Bureau of Alternative Learning Systems (BALS) in the Department of Education is the over-all curricular framework for non-formal education system. Non-formal education programs are meant for school drop-outs, adults, and out-of-school youth who want to study at their own pace and place.

The ALS curriculum is applied to the indigenous education programs with innovations consisting of the use of indigenous learning and teaching techniques (i.e., more group work, use of the outdoors as venues for lessons) and increased use of indigenous materials for teaching aids.

The Sentrong Paaralan ng mga Agta in Narak, Quezon under the support of the Prelature of Infanta uses this curriculum.

#### • Own System

This approach is employed in areas where the formal school setting is not applicable and appropriate (e.g., areas where the school is being introduced for the first time or is quite far from the town proper), or the communities have

decided to design their own school set-up in response to the painful impacts discussed earlier. In these initiatives, some of the innovations are the following:

- The community decides on their school's overall direction, management concerns and key content that should be part of the curriculum
- While financial resources usually come from benefactors and/or funding agencies, the community participates in the setting-up of the school and provides counterpart resources for the construction of school facilities like labor, food, construction materials, etc.
- Local materials are used in setting up the facilities, like grass for roofing, etc.
- The architecture of the school building is patterned after the indigenous architecture in the community
- The management of the school includes the local organization of the tribe or community
- Community disciplinary procedures are used in maintaining discipline among the students
- Indigenous teachers are prioritized in selecting teachers
- The curriculum design is based on the flow of community life in such a way that topics are discussed in direct relation to community activity cycles
- Indigenous competencies are included and complemented with the competencies required by the Department of Education
- Some communities modify the school calendar (without decreasing the required number of school days) to take into consideration local climate patterns, thus avoiding absences due to rains, flooded rivers, etc.
- Indigenous materials are used as teaching aids as appropriate
- Indigenous teaching and learning methods are incorporated as teaching methods.

The following use this approach:

- Dioceses of Tarlac, Kidapawan, Kalibo, Digos, Butuan, and Surigao
- Vicariates of Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro

The variety of responses is largely due to the variety of circumstances of indigenous communities. In areas where the school set-up is a familiar system, indigenous communities tend to try the indigenized formal education approach. In communities hardly reached by schools, the own-system type tends to be more appropriate.

The articulated views of the partner indigenous communities guide the implementation of these efforts. Key differences of present efforts from the previous ones are the following:

- *Community-based*. In the past, efforts were focused on sending students to schools away from the community or the setting up schools in the community but managed exclusively by outsiders. In the emerging efforts, community-based means more than just the school or intervention being in the physical space of the community. Rather, it is the participation of the community in establishing and managing the school or educational intervention in all their aspects.
- *Rootedness in the IKSPs*. Previous efforts focused largely on inculcating content, skills and learning processes determined by the mainstream education system. Present efforts start with the content, skills and learning processes of the community and continue with, complemented by, mainstream content, skills and learning processes as needed and appropriate.
- *Based on indigenous peoples' worldview (philosophy, psychology, spirituality, etc.)*. Again, previous efforts were based on mainstream educational philosophies, psychology, etc. The new efforts aim at education programs/interventions that flow from the indigenous community's worldview.

- *Stresses identity, cultural heritage and self-determination.* Previous efforts glossed over the context of the community since what was viewed as important was for the 'educated' to be effectively assimilated into mainstream society. Today, more and more efforts recognize that the education programs/interventions should be anchored on and responsive to the context of indigenous communities and thus the focus on valuing cultural heritage and identity, and asserting self-determination.
- *Focuses not only on cultural manifestations (songs, dances, stories, etc) but also on culture as living process.* While there have been efforts to include cultural products like songs, dances, stories, artifacts, etc. in the curriculum, they touch only the surface of what culture is. What is needed is the appreciation of culture as process - how the cultural products came about, why they are changing, discussions on the impact of cultural change on communities and identity, the maintenance of intergenerational ties, etc. It is the understanding of cultural processes that will help indigenous youth to better understand why their community is what it is today and how to concretely maintain their community and culture as a living entity.
- *Responsive to present needs and situation (complementation with Department of Education competencies).* Equally important as being rooted in their culture and heritage is the indigenous youth's capacity to face today's world and dynamics. Thus, the program or intervention should harness the necessary skills and impart the needed content and values for them to be able to become active participants in shaping society and the future (not merely adapting to the projected society and future).
- *Systematic, not reactive, response.* There were tendencies in the past to focus only on changing content and making these changes only when problems arose that needed to be solved. With the present view, it is the

whole system that has to be addressed, and it should be done systematically.

These views have been reiterated by indigenous community representatives themselves during the first ECIP-IPA Convention on Indigenous Peoples Education held in May 2006. They identified the fundamental qualities of the education they envision for their communities:

- Rooted in indigenous peoples history and culture
- From the community, managed by the community and for the community
- Strengthens formation towards self-reliance and assertion of human rights
- Enables youth to defend and develop the ancestral domains
- Equips the youth to become active participants in mainstream society without being dominated by globalization, and
- Deeply into values creation.

### **An education system appropriate to indigenous communities**

To further specify what the key components of an education system appropriate to indigenous communities are, IPAs and their partner communities consolidated common and fundamental viewpoints and principles shared by their efforts and expressed them in relation to five components of an education system. This was done during the 2nd National Convention on Indigenous Peoples Education attended by twenty-seven dioceses and sixteen tribes. The five components discussed were: education philosophy, curriculum and evaluation processes, teaching-learning processes, instructional setup, and school management.

#### *Philosophy*

Fundamental to the education philosophy is the recognition that indigenous



peoples have an education system that should be the foundation of the educational interventions.

Where before the end goals of the efforts were to instill mainstream competencies and learning processes, and getting them assimilated in mainstream society, the end goals now are to nurture their sense of identity/indigenous personhood and instill competencies and learning processes both from their system and the mainstream to enable them to assert their rights and self-determination.

To reach these goals, indigenous peoples education should be founded on the following:

- CULTURE (as process and product)
- HISTORY (life-stories woven into the tribe's story, woven into the bigger story of nation and the world)
- HERITAGE (a sense of being a descendant and ancestor)
- SPIRITUALITY (expression of faith life, values and beliefs).

Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and thinking should be an integral part of indigenous education, like:

- Integrative and associative thinking
- Ancestral domain, dreams, and ancestors as teachers
- Learning by doing and experiencing
- Harnessing inner senses (awe and wonder, wisdom, sacred, heritage, etc.) practicing multiple forms of storing and expressing knowledge (body movement, music, chants, crafts, etc.)
- Integrating indigenous peoples' psychology
- Recognizing orality or their oral dynamic of storing and passing on knowledge and wisdom
- Recognizing and giving space for the intuitive ways of expressing knowledge like weaving for math and crafts for the sciences.

In summary, indigenous culture, history, heritage and spirituality are the foundation on which an integrated sense of self and identity is built. Mainstream educational competencies, learning processes and world-view are learned to enable the indigenous people to engage the contemporary times.

### *Curriculum and evaluation processes*

In terms of curriculum, it should:

- Mirror the community's situation and enables learners to deal with the challenges the community faces
- Conceptualized with the community
- Based on IKSPs and indigenous peoples competencies, and complemented by competencies (Department of Education required competencies) needed to engage the contemporary world
- Flows with the cycle and situation of the community.

Testing and evaluation processes should be:

- A complementation of community and mainstream assessment and evaluation tools and processes
- Done with participation of the community.

### *Teaching and learning processes*

Indigenous teaching and learning processes should include:

- Revealed knowledge (dreams, etc.), ancestral domain, and elders as teachers
- Tribal language
- Community teaching-learning processes complemented by mainstream ones.

### *Instructional set-up*

Key aspects of the instructional set-up should necessarily include:

- Adjustment of the education calendar to

the pattern of life of the community

- Use of appropriate educational aids
- Indigenous peoples as teachers (if not indigenous peoples, they should have deep respect for indigenous peoples' way of life and can live or flow with the community)
- Buildings or structures that are culture-sensitive and based on indigenous architecture.

### *Management*

Indigenous communities have been very assertive about their right to be part of school or program management. Not only is it consistent with their communal way of living, but they strongly feel that being part of management will allow them to take part in defining and designing the kind of education their tribe and community needs.

### **The Indigenous Peoples Education System**

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> National IP Education Convention in May 2007, the reports on key findings of case studies done in four areas in the country significantly articulated what the indigenous education system was. The following are the key points shared so far:

#### *Indigenous communities have a system of education*

Each tribe in the country has a system that started since time immemorial of transmitting knowledge and forming the youth to become responsible human beings.

This view is similar to the modern concept of "education," a word derived from the Latin word *educare* meaning 'bringing up or rearing' (Frankena, 2003). This also relates to the international concept of *indigenous knowledge systems and practices* (IKSPs), the system of knowledge generation, storage,

transmission, and evaluation being kept alive by indigenous communities in different parts of the world. These knowledge and ways of knowing are nurtured and acquired through centuries of living with the ancestral domain. As one Hopi elder (USA) put it:

People always ask,  
'So where do you get your knowledge?'  
and I say, 'From the ancestors, from the time of  
creation.'

- Hopi elder, 1993 (Survival, 1994)

#### *The ancestral domain – school of indigenous communities*

Where was their school? Elders say that learning is anywhere - the home, the fields, the rivers, during walks, hunting, planting, etc.

#### *Learning is everywhere and at every moment.*

The learning space is the ancestral domain.

This similar to the 'lifelong learning' concept in education circles today. This indigenous education system that has been practiced for centuries has to be recalled by indigenous communities.

In some tribes, learning venues or institutions are also present like the *dap-ay* (for males) and *ulog* (for females). These are venues for youth to gather and, in interaction with the elders, learn about community dynamics and practices (Fiag-oy, 2005; Angui, 1997).

#### *The sources of knowledge and wisdom*

Who taught our ancestors? The elders say that anyone is a possible source of knowledge and companion in the learning process - parents, grandparents, elders who have recognized expertise, even peers, and

younger children.

What is passed on from one generation to the next is usually called traditional knowledge (Castellano, 2000 cited in Steinhauer, 2002). Perhaps if there is one teacher unique to indigenous peoples, it is the ancestral domain or creation. Elders speak of particular creatures ‘telling us’ or ‘teaching us’. Another unique ‘teacher’ would be dreams, with some tribes learning their weaving designs, medicinal plants and other knowledge through dreams (Fiag-oy, 2005; Peterno, Alvina & Javellana, 2000). Dreams as a kind of ‘teacher’ is also called revealed knowledge (Steinhauer, 2002). It is unfortunate that today, these types of knowledge have been labeled as superstitions.

### *Indigenous Peoples have a curriculum too*

The indigenous peoples have a sequence of content and competencies to be taught based on the stage of growth of the person.

Indigenous education therefore has a curriculum, which varies depending on the situation of the tribe.

### *Indigenous books and knowledge storage system*

The elders are the repository of knowledge. Their memory is the library of indigenous communities. Elders say that knowledge is also stored in songs, chants, dances, rituals, and day-to-day activities of the tribe. One elder stressed that day-to-day living and the cycle of life of the community was the ultimate repository of knowledge, for it was in living the knowledge that its remembrance and storage were ensured.

Another repository of knowledge is called cellular memory (Steinhauer, 2002). One example is the competency, which evolved through the centuries of making rice terraces, of indigenous communities of the

Cordillera mountains (in northern Philippines) to work with rocks, mountains and soil. This is a natural competency among the members of the indigenous community that cannot be taught in any Master’s or PhD course anywhere in the world. It can only be learned by being part of the ancestry (blood) and living in and working in the ancestral domain so that this competency (which includes psycho-emotional components) is nurtured and practiced.

### *Evaluating learning – Indigenous Peoples have exams too*

The elders see application of knowledge as the test in itself, with the outcome being the indicator of degree of knowledge gained. Depending on the tribe, there are indicators of mastery. The part of the body hit by a trap, for example, shows how skillful a Mangyan hunter is in making the trap. Another indicator of learning was the capacity to teach others. Some tribes have titles for the experts in their communities equivalent to today’s Master’s and PhD degrees.

### *Indigenous Peoples education philosophy*

The tribe’s worldview guides the whole process of learning the IKSPs of the community.

A worldview is “a unified vision rather than an individual idea.” (Redfield, 1982, cited in Steinhauer, 2002). Below are the words of Macli-ing Dulag, a Kalinga tribal elder killed in the early 1980s as he led his community in its opposition to the building of the Chico Dam in northern Philippines. These few poetic lines articulate the deep meanings of his tribe’s reason for being:

Afo Kafunian, Lord of us all, gave us life  
and placed us in the world to live human  
lives.

And where shall we obtain life? From the  
land.

To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right.

In tilling the land, you possess it.

And so, land is a grace that must be nurtured.

To enrich it is the eternal exhortation of Afo Kafunian to all Kafunian's children.

Land is sacred. Land is beloved.

From its womb springs our Kalinga life.

(Anno, 2003)

That **land is life and is sacred** is fundamental to their worldview, and this permeates their IKSPs where the ancestral domain is classroom and teacher at the same time, and nurturing and protecting the ancestral domain is a fundamental tenet in molding the young.

### *Teaching-learning strategies*

Among tribes, there are some common teaching-learning strategies such as demonstration, actual activity, apprenticeship (for specialized roles like healers and shamans), and direct instruction.

### **The key concerns on Indigenous Peoples education**

Aside from articulating the foundations of an education system appropriate for indigenous peoples, two key concerns were also mentioned during the second Convention:

- There is a need to consciously affirm indigenous peoples' sense of personhood and reflect on what this means through formation processes. Learning indigenous competencies does not necessarily translate into a deep sense of indigenous peoples' identity.
- The indigenous communities recognize the need to document IKSPs that are almost forgotten. However, they do not accept irresponsible and insensitive research done in the past.

In response to this, the Indigenous Peoples Education Program together with indigenous communities are trying to systematize cultural process research that:

- recognizes research as a necessary component in developing the indigenous component (content, competencies, etc.) of the whole educational experience
- heals the breakdown of intergenerational ties and the demise of communal knowledge-generation processes
- goes beyond the "book-making" concept of research
- stresses research that views culture as living and lived process, and not just products.

The 2007 Convention also recognized that there are key concerns or challenges that any group doing an education intervention should continually reflect on if the intervention is to genuinely contribute to the continued life of indigenous communities:

How can our education efforts:

- heal broken intergenerational ties?
- restore community reflection and knowledge generation processes?
- nurture the indigenous peoples' sense of personhood as reflected in their connectedness with the ancestral domain and assertion for self-determination?
- celebrate the tribal spirit that, given proper recognition and respect, renews their culture?

### **Conclusions**

Given the results of this consolidation effort, indigenous communities with their partner IPAs and religious congregations are now better guided as they continue to reformulate and/or reconstruct their education programs so that they contribute to the **regeneration of culture, restoration of the dignity of indigenous communities, and rootedness in history and**

### cultural heritage.

For us in the church, respect for culture is not only due to the recognition of the right to culture of a particular community or group of people like our indigenous brothers and sisters. It is also based on the recognition that cultures, like those of indigenous communities, are born out of a peoples' struggle and quest to deal with the basic questions of life, which in the final analysis, are spiritual questions. As Michel de Certeau, SJ (1966) has expressed, "A culture is a language of a spiritual experience."

Sometimes we ask, what is so important about culture? Why should we, like our indigenous sisters and brothers, be so assertive about it? It is not just because of its aesthetic value, or its uniqueness or the economics of it. Culture is at the core of being human, an expression of how we have encountered God through life-questions. It contains the blessings or graces of God to a people which, if nurtured well, make us able to share these blessings and graces with each other. In the case of our indigenous brothers and sisters, they have shared their blessings with us but were abused, neglected and ridiculed in return.

We hope to continue journeying with our indigenous brothers and sisters as they articulate and define an education system that will once again nurture their tribe, communities and culture, before it is too late.

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