



Pathways to Education

**Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples' Education:
Leading the Way**

Ramon Magsaysay Transformative Leadership Institute

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PAMULAAN CENTER FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' EDUCATION: LEADING THE WAY

In piloting an education model that is sensitive to the experiences of young indigenous peoples in the Philippines, Pamulaan has shown the way for government to scale up.

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It is Solidarity Night at Kalindogan 2009, an annual congress of young people from ethnic communities from all over the Philippines. Central to this yearly gathering of indigenous peoples (IP) are stories of how faith in the native culture is driving the struggle for cultural integrity, self-determination, rights to ancestral domains and access to basic social services. Following the discussions, it is time for a celebration of song and dance. Taking center stage are 25 teenage students from Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples' Education, also known as Pamulaan, dressed in colorful tribal wear. To the strumming of the guitar and the beating of drums, they sing a song with lyrics by J.K. Belec that articulate their hopes and dreams for the future.

"Look around you, a world of strife.

Shall we let it go on and on?

*Together, we the youth and our elders, we will
build a lasting peace for all, rich and poor.*

Now is the time to unite for peace."



A proud mother with her son on graduation day at Pamulaan.

Solidarity Night is the highlight of the two-day congress on the theme of “Reclaiming Indigenous Leadership.” As the event draws to a close, Benjamin Abadiano, founder, and president of the Pamulaan Center addresses a crowd of 212 people from 41 tribes. “This has been a time to reflect on the need for leadership beyond family and community life to national governance systems that impact as well on the governance of indigenous peoples,” he said to an audience comprising local and national leaders, indigenous elders, and mostly young people from the Philippines’ indigenous groups.

The Pamulaan Center for Indigenous Peoples’ Education is a formal, tertiary school providing education for indigenous peoples as a means to build their self-reliance. Departing from mainstream systems of instruction, Pamulaan espouses an education rooted in the life and culture of indigenous peoples. Cultural values and traditions inspire school programs that focus on forming leaders amongst the youth, as well as developing the IP

elders. Founded as a unique partnership between non-government organizations (NGOs), academia, and the state, Pamulaan has gone far in its first ten years. It has developed a curricula to fulfill the degree requirements of the University of South-eastern Philippines, and six batches of students have graduated with degrees in peace education, education, anthropology, agriculture, and social entrepreneurship. Holding jobs in different government agencies and NGOs, graduates have shown their potential to develop into IP leaders upholding the uniqueness of their cultural identities, and using their education to support community development and advocate for IP rights.

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS

Who are the indigenous peoples, the “IPs” of the Philippines, and why do their songs and poetry express yearnings for peace? As of the latest available census in 2007, IPs consist of about 16



A graduation ritual being performed at Pamulaan, where an elder marks the graduate’s hand as a blessing.

percent of the country's population — at least 14 million people from 110 ethnic tribes. These native communities continue to reside in what they call their ancestral domains. IPs living in isolated forests or coastal zones have been able to preserve their languages, customs, and traditions. Because these ancestral lands are often rich in commercially valuable natural resources, IPs have unfortunately suffered from the ill effects of encroachment or land grabbing by those exploring mining, logging, or plantation ventures.

The IP struggle has thus been about land rights, which they hold sacred and from which they have been dispossessed or displaced for centuries. Driven deeper into the forest where they are even more isolated, IPs continue to lack opportunities to participate in mainstream politics, the economy, and formal education. Government policies in the early 20th century were not protective of IP rights, often perpetuating unjust treatment of IPs. Tribal elders to this day have lamented their peoples' struggle. "Our lands, the lands of our forefathers... were not titled, so many of us eventually lost them to trespassers," said Segundo Kalignayan, an elder of the Mangyan-Alangan tribe. "In the struggle, we are discriminated against, treated unfairly, or abused because we lacked education."

A LANDMARK LEGISLATION: THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' RIGHTS ACT

In 1997, the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) was passed in recognition of IPs' land rights, the development of their ancestral domains, and a right to cultural integrity. The law also provided for the creation of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), a government agency mandated to promote and protect the rights and well-being of IPs by issuing formal land certificates. The commission would also support IP self-governance, empowerment, and education. "The law serves as a model that is being looked upon by different countries with IP constituencies," said a government official from the Ancestral Domain Management Program of the Department of

Environment and Natural Resources, in an article on the then-new law by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Despite the gains made and the promotion of the rights of IPs, they have remained among the most vulnerable and poorest of groups in the Philippines, with limited access to quality education, healthcare, and other basic services such as potable water and electricity. About 54 percent of IPs live in the island of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines. Many IP groups have continued to be affected by the protracted conflict between the government and insurgents, subjecting them to the militarization of communities and schools, and to human rights violations. As a result, nine out of ten children of the *Lumad* (literally "indigenous peoples") tribes in Mindanao were without schooling in 2015, reported Salinlahi, a child-rights organization, in a report from the National Federation of Indigenous Peoples' Organizations in the Philippines. Local tribes are often caught in the crossfire or forced to evacuate, living in fear of being recruited by insurgents or humiliated, as the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation recorded in its 2013 book *Vignettes of Transformative Leadership*.

Such conditions are driving the IPs' pursuit for "a culture of peace," which is underpinned by aspirations for justice, progress, social solidarity and peace, and quality education, according to Abadiano. Much of his motivation in establishing Pamulaan has been the quest for the latter, which he sees as key to the empowerment of IPs.

AN EDUCATION BASED ON IP CULTURE

Many church-based missionaries had set up literacy programs for IPs as early as the mid-1900s, paving the way for other NGOs to support the cause of education for IPs in the 1980s. These education advocates helped pressure the government to develop and pass the IPRA Law. The government planning agency then convened a technical working group that invited NGO leaders like Abadiano to share the learnings on culture-based education. Eventually, in 2011, a policy framework

was approved by the state-run Department of Education that resulted in the creation and funding of the IP Education Office.

In the past, IP children had no choice but to go to public schools where they had to conform to the mainstream culture and methods of instruction as outlined in an influential 2010 report titled “Culture-based Education Programme for Indigenous Children and Youth in the Philippines” by UNESCO and the Asia-Pacific Center of Education for International Understanding. According to a 2014 study by the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the impact of this school system on IP children was nothing less than traumatic in some cases. Taken completely out of their cultural context, the IP learner was more prone to low self-esteem, shame, and a loss of culture and identity. This led many children to drop out of school. “I was different from my classmates,” remembers a young man from the Manobo tribe of Davao Oriental. “I will never forget the time I first went to school when I was six. When lunch break came, I climbed a tree and ate my food there. My classmates laughed at me. I didn’t understand why until they started talking about why I was different.”

The Episcopal Commission pointed to such experiences as being damaging to the fabric of communities, as IP students in mainstream schools learned to disvalue their culture and heritage in order to fit in. Such evidence would drive new initiatives in IP education. One of the early successes was the Tugdaan Mangyan Center for Education and Development in 1989, started by Benjamin Abadiano with the support of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit.

THE LEADER: BENJAMIN ABADIANO

As a young boy, Abadiano grew up in the care of adoptive grandparents in Lanao del Norte, Mindanao. He never knew his biological parents, but his grandparents taught him to be grateful for his many blessings and to be content. There came a difficult period when Abadiano had to live with other relatives and drop out of school due to lack of financial means. When he was able to resume schooling,

he studied harder and excelled, winning a scholarship to the Jesuit-run Xavier University where he completed a degree in socio-anthropology. While in college, he was first exposed to the harsh realities faced by the Manobo tribes in Bukidnon Province by a Jesuit priest. Later, he applied to join the Jesuits, but his application was deferred.

Abadiano spent some time visiting the places of different indigenous peoples. He left Mindanao and reached Mindoro Island, southwest of Manila, where he volunteered for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit working with the Mangyan tribes. He learned to speak the local language as he worked tirelessly to build the Tugdaan School. *Tugdaan*, which means “seedbed” in the Mangyan language, began life as an informal program of learning tailored to the Mangyans’ way of life. From one classroom with a handful of students, Abadiano slowly built up to a school for basic education, and along the way, he developed a learning framework based on the students’ culture. “For him [Abadiano], one’s culture was one’s strength,” said Zenaida Pawid, former chair of the NCIP. “The goal of IP education was to strengthen rootedness in one’s culture to make the IPs competitive with the larger society.”

Over 23 years, Tugdaan deepened the holistic development of the Mangyan ethnic communities, fulfilling the elders’ dream of an education suited to their culture. Tugdaan developed a leadership program for elders to strengthen their pursuit of land rights and community development. Tugdaan also became known for its social enterprise; the processing of Mangyan farmers’ crops into food products. This and other community income-generating projects helped to support the school.

Abadiano left Tugdaan after nine years of living among the Mangyans. By then, the school was fully functional under the management of Mangyan leaders, with Tugdaan graduates among them. In the years that followed, Abadiano began working with the Assisi Development Foundation, a leading advocate for justice and peace for marginalized people, especially IPs. There, he headed up a multi-sector rehabilitation program for IPs



Benjamin Abadiano speaking at Pamulaan's graduation ceremony.

displaced by the fighting in Mindanao. Around 72 “Sanctuaries of Peace” or conflict-free zones were negotiated between the military and insurgents.

For this and his work in IP education, he received the coveted Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2004. A year later, he became president of the Assisi Development Foundation. In this position, Abadiano had returned to his long-held passion for developing education for IP leaders. “[This was the] gift I received from the Mangyan elders who shared their vision with me,” he said.

A SEEDBED TO GROW IP LEADERS

In 2005, Abadiano met Julieta Ortiz, the president of the University of Southeastern Philippines in Davao City. Abadiano told her of his dream of setting up a college that would strengthen IP leadership and produce graduates with the knowledge and competence to develop sustainable solutions for the issues confronting their communities. The idea resonated with Ortiz, who was enthusiastic to host such a college within the university. Having returned to the Philippines from the United States with a doctorate in education, she saw how IP youths across the country were disadvantaged in gaining access to higher education. “Education is for all, and the role of state universities is to reach out especially to those in the peripheries, including the IPs,” she said.

Ortiz and Abadiano agreed: the center, which would be named Pamulaan, would offer scholarships nationwide beyond Mindanao. They envisioned graduates becoming IP leaders in the fields of education, anthropology, agriculture technology, peace education, and social entrepreneurship — disciplines that would produce the teachers needed in the tribal schools, agriculturists for farms, community development workers for social progress, and founders and managers of IP social enterprises. Pamulaan would also host the country’s first Living Heritage Center to promote the rich cultural diversity of the country’s IPs.

FIVE PARTNERS INVEST

Abadiano and Ortiz had the full backing of the NCIP, which became an important collaborator in the establishment of Pamulaan. “We wanted to ensure that culturally sensitive curricula was taught in the IP schools and that these schools were brought nearer to the communities,” said Leonor T. Quintayo, NCIP chair.

“We saw a natural partnership with Pamulaan,” said Coleen Hernandez of Cartwheel Foundation, another initial investor. “We wanted our scholars to go to a college that would nurture cultural diversity instead of mainstream colleges.” Abadiano brought in two other NGOs he was involved with, the Ilawan

Center for Volunteerism and Leadership and the Assisi Development Foundation. At the time, Abadiano had just been appointed as its new president by founder Howard Dee, who was one of the country's most generous leaders in social development.

Abadiano used a significant portion of his Ramon Magsaysay prize money for construction of the dormitory, while a grant from a competition organized by the World Bank and the Japan Embassy for innovative projects paid for the training hall. The board of the Ilawan Center, an NGO, helped to fund the construction of classrooms. The Assisi Development Foundation and its partners, Hope International Development Agency and Cartwheel Foundation provided the scholarship funds.

Upon approval of the Pamulaan project by the Board of Regents of the University of Southeastern Philippines and the signing of a 20-year memoran-

dum of agreement in October 2006, Abadiano and Ortiz went on to the next challenge. Together, the founding partners undertook "the tedious and challenging process of putting up the college," recalled Abadiano. They screened applicants endorsed by IP communities or sponsoring organizations, developed the curricula, conducted teacher and staff orientation, and set up various management systems in accordance with university protocols.

For Abadiano, Pamulaan was all about "strengthening IP leadership through education." Drawing a link to his experiences with the Mangyan tribes, Abadiano adopted the Tugdaan Center's symbol of a young plant with strong roots planted in a seedbed.

FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND COLLEGE OPENS

Classes opened at Pamulaan in 2006 to great acclaim. A columnist for the national broadsheet



A student guides visitors inside the Living Heritage Center.

Philippine Daily Inquirer reported on the opening of the school with 47 indigenous youth students from 19 tribes: “The dream has come true... This college education is a response to the dream of indigenous communities for an education rooted in their life, culture, and aspirations as a people. It is the first of its kind in the country.”

Among the 47 first-year college students was Kristine Mae Sumalinab from the Mandaya tribe. She had applied for a scholarship after her mother’s friend told them about Pamulaan. The selection process required that applicants were endorsed by an IP community and that they had passed basic education. Sumalinab wanted to follow in the footsteps of her mother, a day care worker in their community, and her sister, who was a teacher. But she saw how hard her sister had to work as a

caregiver during the day and a student at night to complete her degree in education.

When she won a scholarship to attend Pamulaan, Sumalinab recognized how this was an opportunity to bypass the hurdles faced by her mother and sister. “We are not ordinary students here,” she wrote in her diary. “We are not only developed intellectually but also emotionally, socially, and spiritually. This is a significant step towards the realization of my dream, my peoples’ hopes and aspirations.”

Another scholar, Richel Daonlay, said their elders dreamed of the youth going to school. “With professionals amongst us, we can confront our problems in the community. But where could we go to study?” With its focus on cultural diversity and integrity, Pamulaan became that place. At orientation, students can opt for a two-year associate degree in



Graduates receive congratulations from their parents.

their course of study or a four-year college diploma course, giving them a chance to choose the pathway that suits them best. The first six batches saw the student body blossom from its inaugural class of 47 in 2006 to 168 students from 36 tribes.

THE PAMULAAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Sumalinab and Daonlay both received a unique education at Pamulaan. Underpinning the culture-based instruction they received was training on the “4Cs”: community vision, culture and tradition, current realities, and competencies.

Community Vision

Pamulaan students are required to undertake practical tasks for IP communities under the supervision of an elder or an NGO leader working in the area. On one of her many community visits, student Daonlay taught a literacy class. “I can never forget seeing a Datu, a tribal leader in my class,” she recalls. The book in his hand was upside down. “I was struck by the realization that he had not had the opportunity to learn to read. He and the elders wanted the youth to read and study. They wanted the next generation to receive the cultural legacy as they had from their elders.” Culture-based education was how the elders envisioned that the youth would value their unique identity even as they spread their wings to interact with mainstream society. Daonlay understood then how Pamulaan was inspired by the IP elders’ vision. For NCIP’s Quintayo, the Community Service Learning program helped to prepare students for life after school. “Pamulaan had modules that engaged students in the community...and prepared them for future service to IPs,” she said. “This was the most unique feature in Pamulaan education.”

Cultural Practices and Traditions

Students had many ways of sharing the cultural practices and traditions of their communities on a daily basis. Inside and outside the classroom, they exchanged information about indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices (IKSPs). The

IPs had myriad significant practices inspired by living close to nature that reflected their systems of governance, kinship, health and wellness, adaptation to severe weather, and other aspects of life. The students captured this knowledge as best they could. They tapped the wisdom of their elders in their campus life. When it came to clearing up misunderstandings among themselves, they retreated to a forum for reconciliation, inside the Mangyans’ home, at the Living Heritage Center. The Mangyans were known to be among the most peaceful of the tribes, having developed a traditional practice for effective conflict resolution.

In times of celebration, the students gathered around Pamulaan’s ritual area, or “Panubaran,” as the Matigsalug tribe called it. This outdoor cultural space was where students excitedly shared each other’s songs and dances, folklore, and myths around the bonfire. In doing so, students learned to appreciate their unique cultural traits alongside others and to respect diversity as an affirmation of one’s roots. “I re-learned how to perform my tribe’s dance in Pamulaan,” said student Melvin Guilleno, who had almost forgotten the dance while growing up away from his community.

Current Realities

Sumalinab treasured the time she visited communities as her most meaningful and unforgettable experiences as a student at Pamulaan. “As I visited many IP communities, I understood a lot about the harsh realities of poverty they faced. [Because of this,] I grew in my resolve to serve IP communities,” she said. Daonlay agreed that the Community Service Learning Program was an opportunity to reflect on the needs of IP communities and local schools. The elders knew that many young children dropped out because teachers were usually from lowland communities and used English in the classroom, which students could not understand. Pamulaan’s philosophy is that teachers should come from within the community so they could teach in their language or dialect, and facilitate effective learning.

Competencies

Sumalinab and Daonlay were among the top students of their classes. They sustained a high level of interest in key subjects such as the history of Philippine IP culture, the history of foreign IP cultures, appreciation of IP arts and culture, research and documentation on indigenous knowledge and practices, and leadership and governance. In later years of study, core courses include “Ancestral Domain Development Plan and Protection,” “The Indigenous Development of the Philippines: Problems and Prospects,” and special training on peace building and reconciliation.

Time in communities is spent putting into practice the methods the students have learned, such as rapid participatory appraisal (an approach for building empowerment in communities), census mapping, and organization of community projects. “I also learned how to do ethnographic research, how to document and archive, paralegal training, and facilitation skills,” said Daonlay. She recognized that she was learning tools of anthropology that would allow her to better understand community dynamics.

Teachers adapted their lessons to the IP worldview. In the early years of Pamulaan, however, the

teachers had to learn how to facilitate discussions for IP classes. “When we returned to school from community visits, we shared in class what IKSPs we had collected,” recalled Sumalinab. “I felt that some of our teachers, those unfamiliar with IP culture, had difficulty in effectively facilitating our experiences. But through constant interaction with us, they overcame this difficulty.” Daonlay concurred. “I felt the learning exchange was always a two-way process. They learned from us as we learned from them,” she said. “We were rich sources of knowledge about IP life that they tapped for classroom learning.”

A LIVING HERITAGE CENTRE

The “heart and soul of IP education,” as Pamulaan students referred to it, was the Living Heritage Center. A first in the country, the center brought together the stories of IPs from all over the Philippines. The center’s collection includes:

- A databank or hub of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) that were put together since 2007
- IP culture-sensitive census mapping, covering Mindanao and five other provinces



Pamulaan students outside of the Living Heritage Center.

- A research center for Filipino indigenous culture, including the “Bahay Lakoy” of the Mangyans that celebrates community beliefs and rituals
- A sacred space for indigenous healing and medicinal plants

All of the collected examples or representations of IKSPs are displayed artistically within the center, each one placed according to their origin. The Mangyan home featured space for conflict resolution and healing, the same one now used by Pamulaan students whenever they needed to clear up misunderstandings amongst them. Symbols for language adorned the walls of areas where communities gathered for learning and storytelling.

The center was conceived as an innovative repository for IP culture, serving to educate the public while providing a dynamic learning environment for Pamulaan students. Gemma Nicolas, a Mangyan Hanunuo who was among the first batch of graduates with a bachelor’s degree in anthropology, became the first curator of the center in 2007. “I became more proud of being an IP, because of the proud display of my culture and other IP cultures,” she said. Nicolas’ role as curator included training student visitor guides. They had short presentations about the different exhibits before inviting visitors to examine the artifacts and entertaining questions about them. When Nicolas left the Living Heritage Center for another job, she said goodbye to her personal contribution there, a musical instrument resembling a violin that Mangyans played to lull their young children to sleep. The instrument had been hand-made by a friend, and for the string attached to the bow, her friend had used a strand of Nicolas’ hair.

In 2015, the curator was Dionisio Lumawas, of the Manobo tribe and another Pamulaan anthropology bachelor’s graduate. He described his duties as maintaining the Center’s cultural artifacts and operating its various programs. Organizing the many tours and intercultural dialogues requested by universities, colleges, NGOs and others — aimed at providing accurate and rich information about the country’s IPs — was a

critical part of Lumawas’ responsibilities. He also assisted Pamulaan students in the research and documentation of their own indigenous cultures, reports of which are found in the special collection of the library.

LEADERSHIP FORMATION

Daonlay and Sumalinab described involvement in leadership formation activities from Day One. Among the values emphasized by their mentors, service to others was paramount. During community visits, they would meet with the elders about local needs before leading activities in service to the community. Students organized themselves into “families,” each one with a distinctive responsibility so that together, the families could serve the entire Pamulaan community.

Leadership, as Abadiano taught Pamulaan students, is the ability to empower others and provide new opportunities for “**GROWTH**.” Using this acronym, he outlined the values that enabled a leader to serve others:

- **Grace:** The opportunity to serve others. Give your best.
- **Respect:** What makes us more compassionate.
- **Openness:** Bridges our lives with those of others, for living in harmony.
- **Willingness:** To live simply, to work with others, to share.
- **Trust :** In yourself and others to be able to do what you collectively seek.
- **Hope:** Be a bearer of hope.

Daonlay said these values became deeply ingrained. Her own growth story started with serious doubts that she was in the right school. “The key to success, many people told me, was to learn English well. Then work overseas. Build my own house from my earnings,” she said. “But Pamulaan made me look inward and discover the richness of my own culture and to treasure it. Pamulaan provided continuous reflection on the current realities and challenges of my fellow IPs.” Daonlay’s experiences and reflections during her time at Pamulaan changed her dream of teaching abroad to one of

becoming an agent of change by teaching within IP communities instead.

Another student who completed a BS in Peace Education, Ronalyn Floro of the Agusanon Manobo tribe, recounted her transformation into a young leader. Referring to her experience as a “Lumad,” the collective name for the tribes in the Visayas and Mindanao regions of the Philippines, she said: “I used to consider my *Lumad* blood as a ‘stain’ to my being [because of our backwardness]. I grew up feeling the heat of discrimination from classmates, neighbors, and other people. In Pamulaan, I learned about the history of marginalization, colonization, and how we Lumads were pushed to the remote areas of the country.”

Floro’s mind grasped the historical injustice done to Lumads. Her shame turned to compassion and courage to help Lumad communities. “I am

sure there are other Lumads who have the same experience of discrimination. I am eager to work with communities through Pamulaan to change this misconception and empower ourselves so that we can fully realize our potentials. There are also other jobs for me outside Pamulaan, but I want to be here to help other Lumads.”

Abadiano handled the formation program himself, ably assisted by a full-time formation manager, Abner Tulon. Their first challenge was screening freshmen applicants for those with leadership potential. The applicants came from different areas, and while Abadiano depended on the endorsing organizations to send carefully chosen applicants, there were problems. These ranged from having applicants who were not from IP communities at all to undisciplined candidates. Abadiano and Tulon learned by doing, and by the fourth batch, Abadiano felt that they had developed better procedures for screening and sizing up of the applicants during the interview.

THE KALINDOGAN, ANNUAL IP YOUTH CONGRESS

Since 2007, the Pamulaan Center conducted an annual national *kalindogan* or “gathering” of different tribes to celebrate and sustain their culture. Students participated actively in discussing community concerns and planning “culturally rooted and peace-promoting” responses to these. In 2010, for example, the concerns were about climate change adaptation and disaster preparedness and management. To date, the Pamulaan Center has organized seven congresses attended by national leaders, local officials, and donor partners. The partners have shared in the responsibilities of convening the event, with Assisi Development Foundation as the organizing committee head. As a consciousness-raising activity on current and relevant issues faced by IP communities, the event is also a leadership exercise for Pamulaan students who are organizers of the solidarity nights, with around 300 youth leaders and elders from 40 tribes all over the country in attendance.



An IP elder who is now a fellow of the IP LED program.



Richel Daonlay graduated from Pamulaan with a degree in elementary education.

COMMENCEMENT

March 2016 saw the first batch of BS graduates in social entrepreneurship receive their diplomas from the new USEP President Lourdes Genera-lao and Assisi Foundation Co-Chair Viel Aquino Dee. Parents stood proudly beside the 34 graduates. Many were dressed in the full garb of their communities while their children wore the school toga— styled in indigenous fashion and beige-colored as a symbol of the land. Many of the parents shared happy sentiments. “We feel very grateful to see our daughter finish,” said one proud parent. “We cannot afford a good school. But we have found it here in Pamulaan.”

Sometimes, teachers stood in as parents of graduates whose families were too far away to come. Several times Dr. Surlita, who taught agriculture, had stood beside her students as parents’ proxy. Surlita becomes emotional herself every graduation day. “A dream is fulfilled,” she said. She gets her inspiration to teach from an IP boy who became an adopted son. She had found him wandering in the local market and asked him to come home and live with her family. It was only later that she learned he had escaped from a violent skirmish with armed groups in their village.

He stayed with her family for two years, helping to mind their small store. Then he suddenly disappeared. She looked for him and waited for his return, and as years passed, her friends comforted her. There were others like him, according to people she spoke with, who wandered into town, worked for a while, and then disappeared. People told her to hope that he had not joined the fighting and was still alive. It is for this boy and other IP youth fighting to live decently that Surlita’s work in Pamulaan takes on great meaning.

Former USEP president Julieta Ortiz, one of the driving forces behind Pamulaan, reflected on how graduates rose to the academic challenges during their time in the university. “It is notable that despite the scholars’ learning difficulties at first, they eventually excelled,” she said. “Some graduates earned honors, even graduating magna cum laude, and a majority passed the national licensure exams for teachers.” For Abadiano and Ortiz, the potential realized by Pamulaan graduates is living proof that for IPs as with other disadvantaged groups, Pamulaan is a reflection of how education can be a great equalizer.

The valedictorian for 2016 was a recipient of the Ayala Young Leaders Congress, a national training program convened by the foundation of the Ayala family that heads up one of the country’s oldest and largest holding groups. The Congress serves as a platform for young Filipinos to develop bold and innovative responses to the issues facing the country. From about 750 applicants every year, only 80 exceptional young people are chosen, of which two to three Pamulaan graduates are usually selected.

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

Ten years after the founding of Pamulaan, the five partners are moving on to a strategic phase in the center’s development. “Pamulaan was not just a window of opportunity, it was a big door that was opened,” said Ortiz. The establishment of the first-ever IP college in the country was not always smooth sailing, but Pamulaan has remained operational even as other programs that started at the

same time have closed down. Abadiano credited the openness of the university to new ideas as a major factor for Pamulaan's success.

Though the partners had no substantive project funds to start with, they succeeded in bringing together complementary resources, acquiring the needed funds and technical know-how to get started. "Money is not a pre-requisite for innovation. It is actually hard to innovate when partners are focused on the money. It's better to start something first," said Abadiano. According to him, it was only when the program was set up and running that the donors came. This was increasingly the case as Pamulaan was able to develop programs and demonstrate proof of concept.

One of the most successful programs initiated by Pamulaan is the IP Leadership & Enterprise Development Academy (IP LED), a skills development and knowledge enhancement program for IP elders. The five-month course combines formal sessions with onsite practice and classroom-based lessons on enterprise development, organizational development, health and indigenous healing, community service and exposure, and knowledge and information management. To date, 78 IP elders have graduated from this program which was designed to help them drive development initiatives in their communities. Now in its second year, the IP Leadership Academy prompted the European Union to tap its graduating "IP Fellows" as community partners in five areas for its own Maternal, Neonatal and Child Healthcare and Nutrition program. In light of this, the EU has given a grant of €300,000 (about US\$338,000) to Pamulaan and the NCIP to continue their work.

Yet another lesson was how the partners achieved the buy-in and trust of IP communities, thereby transforming them into partners. Pamulaan followed the tradition of consulting the elders on understanding urgent needs and priorities within communities. The elders were encouraged to participate in IP LED, where every village-level council was required to have one community representative. Many IP LED elders took up this

position proudly, emboldened by their training from Pamulaan. Youth scholars and volunteers have extended Pamulaan's outreach to community schools in places so remote that few knew how to reach them. Given the sensitive environment in conflict regions, they could at times have been mistaken for information-gathering agents of militant groups. Instead, they were able to convince communities that they were peace-loving volunteers. The community focus of all of Pamulaan's programs and the lessons and skills taught in the classroom have helped their volunteers to succeed in the difficult work of building trust.

Volunteerism is at the heart of Pamulaan's community-based approach and is fully supported and exemplified by the founding board of five partners. The priority placed on this is such that day-to-day operations are overseen by Abadiano as volunteer president. A technical team composed of graduates, all volunteers, provided support for Kalindogan Youth Congress, Local Educators' Advancement Program, the IP LED, and the EU-funded community health program. Only the two officers in charge of programs and training and formation receive remuneration, but they too often volunteer their free time.

OUTLOOK

At this juncture, partners are contemplating support for a study of the impact of Pamulaan in response to the growing interest of national agencies to replicate the center's model in conflict-prone Mindanao. They are also keen to forge the partnership with the national Department of Education's (DepEd) IP Education Office, which is adopting a more systematic, wide-reaching approach to IP education as its contribution to the "Education for All" campaign of the United Nations.

According to Butch Rufino, national coordinator of the IP Education Office, Pamulaan is an example of an innovative approach to inclusive education. "We need institutions like Pamulaan to help us build our capacity to indigenize the education program in the schools," he said. "Pamulaan has

already been hosting our teachers' trainings and visits to the Living Heritage Center for the basic orientation on who are the IPs, why did 'IP' as a social category come about, what is the history of the IP's subjugation by other people asserting their culture, why are IPs claiming ancestral domains?"

A national program for IP education requires that indigenous culture be connected to the national education system. The challenge is integration, which according to Rufino is within the capacity and skills of the elders in the community rather than the teachers. DepEd is preparing to deliver IP education through a massive bureaucratic retooling to train teachers, and for them to engage with communities. School authorities are studying what needs to be done, reexamining community research, the curriculum framework, learning assessment, the learning materials development, and the school planning. Pamulaan's rich experience is directly informing this process.

DepEd is setting up its first public high school dedicated to IPs in Bukidnon Province, and both Pamulaan and the Assisi Development Foundation are critical partners in this endeavor. "The facilities, teachers, and costs would be DepEd's, but the approach and learning systems would be Pamulaan's. Assisi Development Foundation will establish the school before turning it over to us," said Rufino. "They have the experience in sustaining an IP community school." In this way, DepEd would be able to build the needed capacities to eventually extend IP education throughout the country. The school opening is planned for June 2016, and former Pamulaan student Kristine Sumalinab, who is now with the Assisi Development Foundation staff, has been busy on the ground setting up the school. Her fellow graduate Richel Daonlay will be assisting DepEd to replicate the work of Pamulaan at the grade school level through a project in Davao.

Another critical partnership will be the one being fostered with the NCIP, which is scaling up the Pamulaan IP LED leadership training program to empower community leaders. NCIP chair Quintayo has met with Abadiano to start the process of

replication in the provinces of Luzon and Visayas, and there are plans afoot to extend the program to provinces where IP communities have poor access to basic services.

Pamulaan graduates have realized the aspiration of IP elders for young people to pursue an education that roots them deeply in their own cultural community, rather than alienate them. Most if not all of these graduates would have been the first in their families to obtain a college education. Now working as professionals, they constitute a unique group because their dreams revolve around serving others. They are trained to open more community schools, establish community cultural centers, work for partnerships in agriculture on behalf of IP farmers, and establish NGOs dedicated to peace initiatives, social enterprise, and the environment.

Such challenges are complex, and these dreams are much harder to fulfill. But the Pamulaan graduates have been trained to work with communities and to continue to hope. They also have a support network in an association of alumni committed to improving the lives of IP communities. "The search for a relevant educational system for the IP is a long and evolutionary process," said Abadiano. "I certainly believe that for education to have an impact on the lives of IPs, we need to be together in this journey of trying to find the right path in responding to the call of weaving living traditions and indigenous knowledge into education."

Ten years since Pamulaan started, perhaps the most impactful of its contributions is not the long-awaited model of inclusive education for the disadvantaged IP communities — one that the Philippine government is now scaling up. It is the collective capacity of young IP leaders to help the next generation to meet their potential. 🌐

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QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS

Financial

Planned budget versus actual expenditure for fiscal year*	Budget: PHP10,032,000 (US\$220,470) Expenditure: PHP9,543,238 (US\$209,729)
Income composition by source: individuals, corporations, events, trusts, other (please specify as able)	Individuals: PHP927,345 (US\$20,380) Local NGOs: PHP2,608,910 (US\$57,335) International CSOs: PHP7,303,926 (US\$160,516) Use of facilities: PHP1,029,758 (US\$22,631) Interest on bank deposits/ForEx: PHP93,729 (US\$2,060) Total: PHP11,963,668 US\$262,922
Income composition: domestic versus international	Domestic: PHP4,659,742 (US\$102,406); 39% International: PHP7,303,926 (US\$160,516); 61%

Personnel

Staff retention rate	Volunteers serve a one year term, of which the retention rate is 100% Two permanent staff: 100% retention rate
Turnover rate	0%
What is the board composition?	Chairperson: education, anthropology, leadership formation Board members: social enterprise, finance, IP advocacy, community development Gender: men (3), women (2)
How many meetings does the board hold per year?	Annual meeting in March.
How many staff members are there?	Volunteers – 29 Employed staff – 2 Contracted staff – 4
How many staff members have attended some non-profit or management training course?	16

*Quantitative Indicators Continued***Organizational**

Do you publish annual report? Yes/No	Yes
How many sites/locations do you operate in?	Pamulaan Center at USEP, Mintal Campus, Davao City Pamulaan Elementary School, Contract, Davao
Do you measure results?	Yes
What types of outreach?	Social media, television, print (Pamulaan publication)
Did you regularly meet with government representatives?	Yes
If yes, on a scale of 1-3, how close is the relationship with government? 1=not close; 2=somewhat close; 3=very close;	Closeness of relationship = 3 (with Aquino administration)

* Fiscal year 2014-15. Exchange rate: PHP 40.5= US\$1.