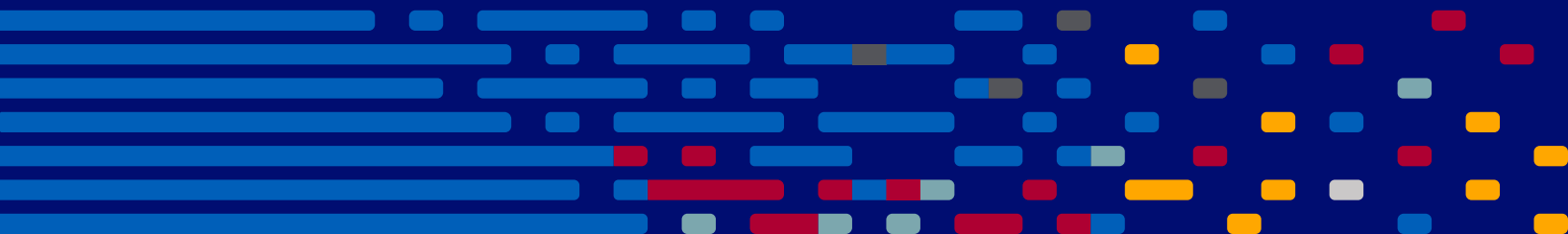


Crafting Futures

Sustaining handloom weaving in the Philippines





© Reginald Sarmenta

© British Council in the Philippines 2020.

Writers and researchers: MUNI (Karina Abola, Reichelle Castro, Lilibeth L. Leh-Arcena, Angelica Misa, Denise Subido).

Report design and illustrations: Kay Aranzanso.

Commissioner: Malaya del Rosario

www.britishcouncil.ph

Foreword

***Crafting Futures* is a British Council global arts programme that supports the future of craft around the world through research, artistic collaboration and education.**

The programme is being launched in the Philippines in 2020. Building on our experience around the world, and more specifically in Southeast Asia, *Crafting Futures* seeks to establish new projects and mutual learning between the creative sectors of the UK, the Philippines and the world.

The Philippines is a country with a vibrant and diverse culture, as reflected in its cultural heritage and emerging practices of artisans today. While there are various reports on the wider craft industries in the Philippines, the British Council identified a need for an updated study on handloom weaving given the sector's motivations to reinvent and propel itself into the local and global craft scene.

We commissioned MUNI, a Philippine-based sustainable communications consultancy, to conduct this study. The research presents insights on the gaps and opportunities in the handloom weaving industry in the Philippines and how it is being impacted by global trends.

Based on in-depth interviews with stakeholder groups across the country, the study provides a holistic picture on handloom weaving in the Philippines. It analyses the different value chains within the sector, as well as the power-interest correlation of its players amid cultural, economic and psychological factors shaping the handloom weaving industry.

In addition to informing our *Crafting Futures* arts programming, we believe the study is a significant contribution to the existing knowledge base on the state of the craft sector in the Philippines.

The British Council is pleased to share the *Crafting Futures* report; we sincerely hope that it will serve as a valuable reference for artisans, designers, entrepreneurs and other decision makers as we continue to co-create a sustainable future for and through craft.

Pilar Aramayo Prudencio

Country Director

British Council in the Philippines

Executive summary



Handloom weaving in the Philippines is going through a pivotal phase.

Efforts to revitalise the industry through economic and cultural interventions are intentionally being developed by several stakeholders, but these are carried out in silos. In the last four decades, livelihood programs for the weavers have been implemented, but despite this, their self-sufficiency has yet to be realised. In addition, current cultural programmes need further support to carry out projects with broader reach and effective impact. While there have been research projects conducted on the craft industry of the Philippines, these have not focused on the local handloom weaving industry and how it is connected to or being affected by movements happening in the rest of the world.

In this context, the British Council commissioned MUNI to conduct a study to help build the programme concept for Crafting Futures in the Philippines, focused on the handloom weaving industry within the context of the wider craft sector in the country and globally. Specifically, MUNI’s objectives were to:

- Gain an understanding of the context of the handloom weaving industry in the Philippines, through the following:**

 - The crucial social, political and economic movements in the past that have directly shaped the industry;
 - The cultural significance of the craft; and
 - Current policies and programs that seek to support the industry.
- Obtain holistic insight into the needs and opportunities within the handloom weaving industry in the Philippines by:**

 - Identifying the most pressing issues and needs of the industry across the value chain;
 - Identifying trends and opportunities, which the local industry can benefit from; and
 - Exploring Philippine handloom weaving’s links with the United Kingdom or Europe, and identifying opportunities for collaboration and partnership.

A three-dimensional framework was utilised to provide a structure for evaluation, and to gain a holistic understanding of the state of the handloom weaving industry in the Philippines today.

Economic: Weaving as a source of livelihood

Cultural: The cultural origins and value of weaving and

Psychological: The psychological motivations and impact of weaving, most especially on the weavers

The framework guided the creation of the tools, the analysis of the results, and the formulation of the recommendations.

The recognition of the intertwined impact of these three dimensions is a novel contribution to the understanding of weaving as an ever-evolving industry.

Information was collected through:

- **Focus group discussions (FGD)** with weaving communities in Ilocos Norte, Cebu, and South Cotabato
- **Key informant interviews (KII)** with the stakeholders in the handloom weaving industry, such as social enterprises, the academe, government and non-government organisations
- **Review of existing related literature**, such as publicly available information, peer-reviewed articles, government and industry reports, among others

Furthermore, data was analysed through:

- **Issues analysis** based on the three-dimensional framework
- **Stakeholder analysis** for each of the issues
- **Value chain analysis** of the economic dimension



Summary of findings

There is a long and storied history of handloom weaving in the Philippines. This context aids in understanding how handloom weaving in the Philippines developed throughout the years in function, meaning, and value.

What was once a personal activity, handloom weaving has evolved into a source of income for women, and, over time, a cottage industry. The impact of industrialisation, mass production, globalisation, and digitisation put pressure on this industry, which brought about changes in production technology and market access, but also left many behind, including the weavers.

To support this industry, many government and non-government interventions geared towards economic development have been implemented.

Movements to support local, sustainable, and ethical goods have increased demand for handwoven textiles. In this regard, the relationships between the weavers, traders, designers and retailers play an essential role in how the textile products are evolving. These different economic interventions resulted in varying levels of growth throughout the sector's value chain.

The gaps in the supply chain, particularly material inputs, pricing, market access, and capacity building, surface as major challenges. However, another crucial matter that needs to be addressed is the income of the weavers, a substantial issue faced by the most important stakeholder group in the supply chain.

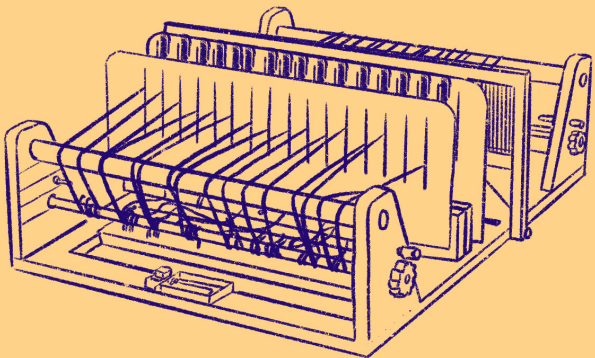
The cultural value of handloom weaving continues to evolve because of its integration into an economic system. Weaving's relevance is re-evaluated by the weavers in the face of financial needs, and this further affects transmission to younger generations. When purchasing products, the market prioritises price over cultural value, though there is a niche market where price is not an issue. Responsible collaborations between weavers and designers have been observed to attempt to be culture-based and community-centered, especially in keeping cultural practices embedded into the supply chain.

In order for weaving to remain relevant to the weavers, there must be continuous consultation, community-building, investment in cultural facilities, and documentation to support the transmission of this craft.

The psychological dimension examines the impact of weaving, as well as the motivations behind the support of the industry. Weaving significantly impacts each weaver through the ways it hinders or enables what they envision to be a good life, such as having the capacity to support their family, in the prestige of being recognised as artists, or when cultural practices and identities are preserved.

The study also reveals the disadvantages that limit the choices the weavers are able to make towards building this good life, which has to do with diminished control and agency. Despite these challenges, the study reveals that weaving is still able to significantly empower weavers as women, artists, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and agents in preserving their culture.

The impact of industrialisation and mass production, globalisation, and digitisation put pressure on this industry, which brought about changes in production technology and market access, but it also left many behind, including the weavers.



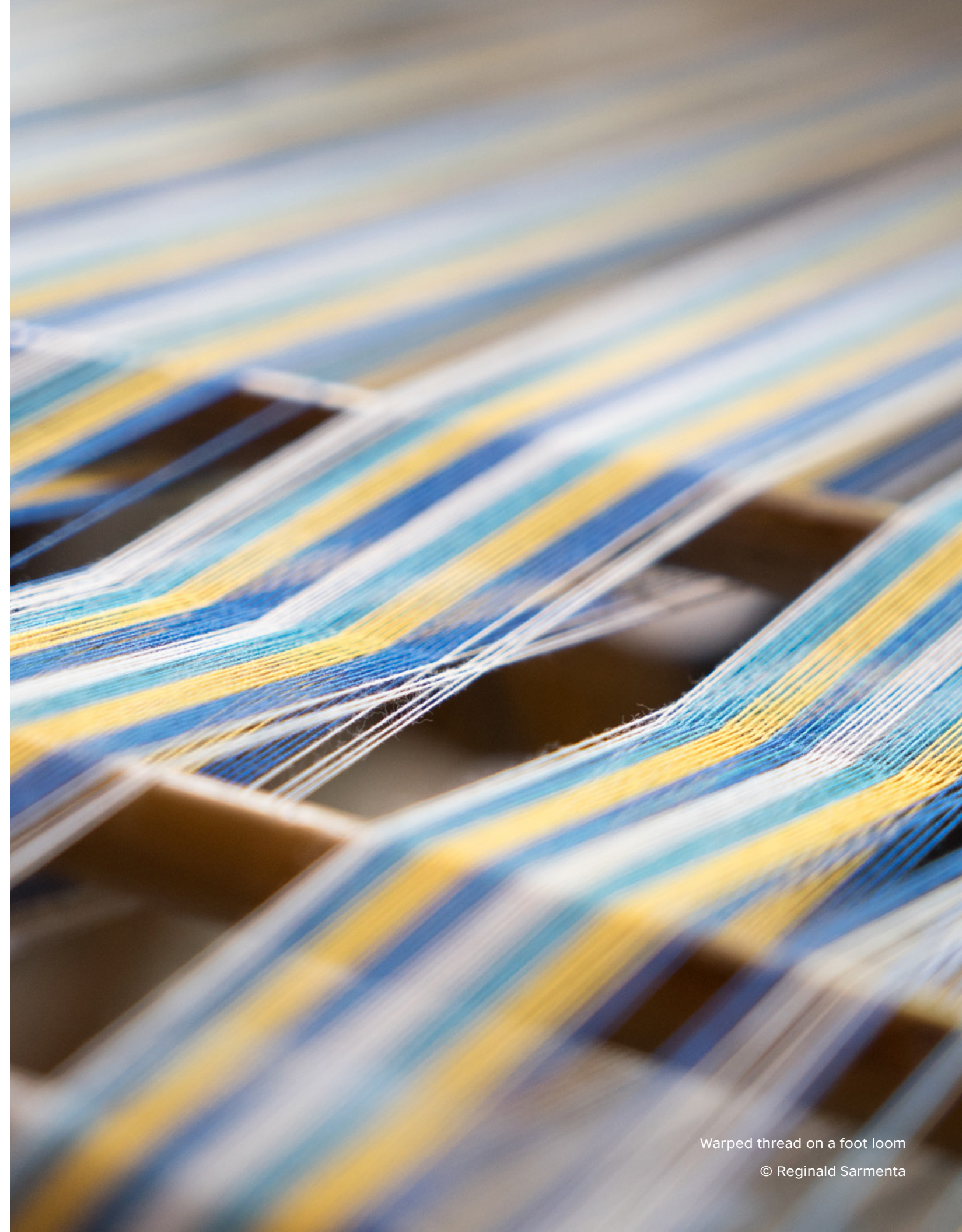
The development of weaving relies on multi-stakeholder efforts. The involvement of all stakeholders is important to drive this industry forward through genuine community development and cultural preservation.

The support of the government is fundamental in the growth and direction of the industry, especially the cohesive assistance of economic and cultural agencies.

Partnerships between weavers, retailers, and designers are essential in capacity building, product promotion, and product development. As such, the research observes the common motivations of other players across the value chain in NGOs, government, and social enterprises. The responses show that the different stakeholders are passionately and intrinsically motivated to persevere through the challenges associated with the industry. It also shows that they are working towards a culture-centric industry that empowers weavers and their communities.

Today, there has been a paradigm shift that recognises the role of culture in holistic and sustainable development. Among many others, this presents opportunities that may be able to raise local handloom weaving's value in the global marketplace.

While economic and cultural interventions were initially treated separately, a singular approach cannot suffice if the interventions' goal is for community development, especially empowerment and self-sufficiency.



Warped thread on a foot loom

© Reginald Sarmenta

Given these findings, the best interventions are those that are holistic and programmatic, recognising that the cultural, psychological and economic dimensions of weaving will always be intertwined. Below, we summarise recommendations to help position the British Council’s *Crafting Futures* programme in the Philippines that can create economic, cultural and empowerment programmes with the different stakeholders in the handloom weaving industry. The actions identified are drawn from evidence, insights, and analysis gathered from the respondents, and recommended in accordance with the British Council’s Art Strategy.

Capacity Building by supporting the local arts sector through the development of business management and technical skills, with the goal of making the weavers self-sufficient.

Arts for Social Change by empowering the weavers, especially cultural masters and indigenous groups, through the extension of safe spaces for dialogue, education, promotion, and collectives that revolve around culture and crafts.

Fostering Collaborations & Networks by creating spaces where meaningful dialogue can take place between the different players in the market in order to connect with and learn from each other. This may also be developed by nurturing collaborations that have the potential to spur innovation.

Policy & Research by advocating for a policy environment that is conducive to the growth of the handloom weaving industry, the sustainability of handloom weaving as an intangible cultural heritage, and the protection of the main stakeholders, the weavers.

Sharing UK Arts with the World by exposing Philippine cultural masters and designers to the creative industries of the United Kingdom through cultural study trips and exchanges to share best practices.



© Mat Wright



On the whole, the current research as a descriptive, qualitative, yet holistic profile of handloom weaving in the Philippines, revealed that weaving is an enterprise comprised of several dimensions that are inextricably intertwined. As such, it is recommended that interventions be developed in a programmatic manner, aligned and coordinated in objectives, maintaining a careful balance between commerce, culture and empowerment across all stakeholders, and employed in consultation and co-creation with the weaving communities.

It is recommended that the **Crafting Futures** programme work towards the development of these dimensions of weaving, simultaneously, equitably and consistently for the growth and sustainability of the handloom weaving industry in the Philippines.



© **British Council in the Philippines** 2020
The British Council is the United Kingdom's
international relations organisation for cultural
relations and educational opportunities.

