

**REVIVING THE ISINAY IKAT  
WEAVING TRADITION:  
EMBODYING INDIGENOUS  
KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL  
VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY  
LIFE AND PRACTICE**

**Patricia M. Araneta, Ph.D.**  
**Project Proponent**

In collaboration with  
**Analyn Salvador-Amores Ph.D.**  
CORDITEX (Cordillera Textiles Project)  
University of the Philippines Baguio



With Funding Support from the British Council  
and the Forest Foundation of the Philippines



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## **Acknowledgement**

The Scoping Study for “Reviving the Isinay Ikat Weaving Tradition: Embodying Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Contemporary Life and Practice” is made possible with the assistance of the following individuals, groups and institutions:

E. Zobel Foundation

Mahalina Foundation

AV Salvador-Amores, CORDITEX (Cordillera Textiles Project), University of the Philippines Baguio

Marlon Martin, Save the Ifugao Rice Terraces Movement (SITMO)

KIWA (Kiyangan Weavers Association), Kiangan Ifugao

Jeannie Laccay, Aruga Handwovens, Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya

Department of Agriculture and  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources  
Municipality of Dupax, Nueva Vizcaya

Charles Castro

Bayani Larosa, IPMR Sangguniang Bayan and Isinay-Aritao Association, Nueva Vizcaya

Albert Bangunan, IPMR Sangguniang Bayan and Isinay-Bambang Association, Nueva Vizcaya

Municipality of Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya

St. Vincent Church, Dupax del Sur

## 1. Project Background and Summary

The scoping project revolves around the revival of a weaving tradition that declined and then disappeared with the Christianization of the Isinay in Dupax del Sur, Nueva Vizcaya. Once known for the finest indigo dyed ikat weaves the Isinay funerary blankets were coveted by the indigenous groups in the Cordilleras in Northern Luzon. It was very valuable not only for its physical manifestations but for its prestige and symbolism. While there are existing ikat technique in Kiangan, Ifugao, the process of retrieval based on archival research, historical documents, and first-hand accounts of elders contributed in the retrieval and re-weaving of the ikat. The ikat is a shared tradition of the Isinay, the Ifugao, the Ibaloy and Kankana-ey speaking communities in Benguet and southern part of the Mountain Province. As a cultural reference, ikat found in foreign museums are digitally repatriated to communities by researchers who had access to this information and resource, and the photographs served as a template in replicating the ikat blankets of the Isinay and Ifugao. Ten years ago, we saw the Ifugao re-weaving ikat and are now producing contemporary ikat blankets. Today, the Isinay are hoping to learn from the Ifugao that which they learned from their ancestors. In addition, both the Ifugao and Isinay are interested in growing organic cotton for their threads and plant based dyes among other material resources associated with ikat weaves.

This scoping research aimed to find out the earlier practices of the Isinay weaving tradition that made their ikat blanket one of the most sought after textile in Northern Luzon. The research questions are:

- (1) What are the traditional weaving practices of the Isinay in Nueva Vizcaya, and its relation neighboring communities in the Cordillera region such as Benguet and Mt. Province, and Ifugao?
- (2) How was this made? What were the materials, techniques and tools used?
- (3) How is this practice perceived by the contemporary Isinay?
- (4) How can retrieval of information on traditional practice be revived in the Isinay community?

Specifically, it will examine a holistic understanding of the Isinay's cultural and historical context (i.e., role of textiles, cultural relevance, trade); and technological information on weaving (i.e., technology, raw material resources, techniques, and tools) will facilitate in reviving sustainable values and conservation of natural resources in relation to the economic, environmental, and social connections that would be beneficial to the community.

Furthermore, a consultation with the Department of Agriculture should inform if it is economically viable to plant cotton in small areas.<sup>1</sup> Initially, we are growing cotton for the needs of the weaving community; also for the farmers to observe and study how cotton and indigo for that matter can grow outside of the economic profitably model of the Department of Agriculture. There are other values that can be drawn out of this process - recalling and applying indigenous knowledge systems on planting and growing cotton and indigo and other plant materials in an organic, chemical free manner.

## **Objectives**

1. To retrieve information of the Isinay weaving tradition from archives, historical documents and other repositories;
2. To conduct preliminary research on the traditional weaving, forest resources and raw materials from the Isinay communities;
3. To conduct a mapping of artisans, farmers, and weaves with notable practices and knowledge systems connecting their craft to sustainable resource management (weaving, cotton planting and indigo dyeing);

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<sup>1</sup> HABI has been working with PhilFiDA in growing cotton in smaller areas of land of 1 to 2 ha. Their latest collaboration has been with the Ayala Foundation. The projects have thus far been successful and weaving communities who have preferences to work with natural and chemical free Philippine cotton have sourced their cotton from HABI

4. To conduct a feasibility study on the revival of traditional practices in the community such as on the replanting of the original raw material such as cotton planting, weaving and *Indigo tinctoria* for natural indigo dyeing.

More focused case studies on how communities with existing resource management plan and or assurance for sustainable supply of raw materials are applying the plan in relation to their craft practices (if any), as such an all-hazards analysis will be considered in the proposed project.

## **Methodology**

The project started in March-April 2022 with initial research on the archival and historical research on the ikat weaving tradition in the Cordillera region. This scoping research builds on the work of Dr. Analyñ Salvador-Amores of the CORDITEX Project which has done extensive research on the Isinay blanket since 2011 (Salvador-Amores 2015, 2018; De Las Peñas and Salvador-Amores, 2015, Reid and Salvador-Amores, 2016). It is on her research and knowledge and her interest in reviving the practice of Isinay ikat weaving that this proposal for a scoping grant is based. She has written on the meaning of the Isinay blanket that was lost as the people of greater Dupax were converted to Christianity. During the scoping research, the team also enabled a research visit to the St. Vincent Ferrer Church in Dupax del Sur, where the last known Isinay woven blanket could be found (Figure 1). Originally, it was displayed at the basement of the church, but this was pulled down due to the renovations by the current Monsignor, and no longer open to public viewing.

However, the team was allowed to view the *uwes pinutuan* (Isinay dyed ikat blanket) and were informed that the church will have a museum made inside the premises of the parish office, and the blanket will be prominently displayed as part of the Isinay culture and identity. In more recent conversations, it appears that remedial steps have been taken to display the Isinay Ikat blanket prominently. This upon the recommendation of the technical assistance program carried out by the National Committee on Museums (NCOM) of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts

(NCCA); as well as the recommendations made by Dr. AV Salvador-Amores to the LGU of Dupax del Sur.



Figure 1: Isinay indigo-dyed blanket found at the St. Vincent Church in Dupax del Sur.



The Isinay ikat traveling blanket as it was found in storage in our visit in April 2022.

In the succeeding months, the team conducted in-depth interviews with Isinay and Ifugao cultural bearers, heads of institutions from various offices such as the Department of Agriculture (DA), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR); Nueva Vizcaya State University, and the LGU of the Dupax del Sur, Municipality in Nueva Vizcaya. Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives Bayani Larosa (Isinay-Aritao Association), Abe Reyes (Isinay-Dupax Association) and Albert Bangunan (Isinay-Bambang Association).

Furthermore, the team also conducted an ikat weaving workshop at the IPED Center in Kiangan, Ifugao last July 2022 that convened weavers from Isinay (Dupax del Sur), Ilongot (Nueva Vizcaya), Kankana-ey and Ibaloy (Benguet) and Bontoc (Mt. Province). These communities (except Ilongot) had roots in the ikat tradition, which was eventually lost. The workshop entailed the assistance of the Ifugao master weavers from the Kiyangan Weavers Association (KIWA) who taught the process of ikat weaving to the participants. The program, logistics, and others were arranged through the CORDITEX, UP Baguio in coordination with the Save the Ifugao Rice Terraces Movement (SITMO). The process of the four-day ikat weaving workshop had focused-group discussions and learn-by-doing technique through the ikat-weaving workshop. The participants were also given the opportunity to visit the current exhibition on textiles, wherein ikat blankets are on display at the Ifugao Museum in Kiangan, Ifugao.

## **Scoping Research Report**

Our scoping centers on the Isinay of Dupax del Sur, Aritao, and Bambang, Nueva Vizcaya based on the research of Dr. Analyn Salvador-Amores. Prior to our visit to the sites in Nueva Vizcaya, we held an introductory conversation in a video call with several members of Isinay Advocates, an NGO whose primary role is to preserve and

promote Isinay culture in schools and in the communities. Alvin Felix, a teacher/ professor is involved with the Isinay community dictionary and with a research on the medicinal plants of the isinay. Mark Laccay, whose interest is in agro-forestry, is professionally a sound systems specialist. Mark had lived and worked in Manila until he felt compelled to return to Dupax del Sur to get in touch with his Isinay roots. Mark's father was a forester. Mark's sister, Jeannie Laccay, sparked the idea of exploring the possibilities for re-discovering and reviving interest and knowledge in the Isinay indigo ikat weaving of the well-known Isinay traveling blanket, the *uwes pinutuan*. She had learned to weave during the pandemic lockdown for reasons other than reviving cultural heritage. She, however, eventually learned about her Isinay heritage and aspired to bring back Isinay weaving and the traveling blanket.

In this initial conversation, Alvin Felix, a Isinay cultural bearer and a college instructor at the Nueva State University (NVSU) responded to our question about the relationship of the Isinay communities with the forest. He replied that there were no forests in close proximity of the areas that we would cover in our field trip. Much of the forested areas had already been converted to rice lands. He did mention the JICA project but that it was not within the areas we would cover. When asked if the present Isinay had, at least, some affinity with the forest in consciousness, he immediately replied that they had none. They had no sense of the forests which were gone. However, he mentioned the Dupax Watershed Forest Reserve in Dupax del Sur, in an honest effort to provide some hope to some kind of restoration to the forest system or at least to the possibilities of educating the community on the importance of the forest in their life and livelihood.

At the outset, it would be prudent to admit that:

1. While we are able to validate the importance of the ikat weaving tradition as an asset in the Isinay's cultural heritage we are not able to currently find physical evidence of its interdependence in the management and conservation of their natural resources, environment and ecosystems. There is currently no apparent system that integrates the arts and culture of the Isinay, their

environment, livelihood and industry. As one traverses the highways there are many craft shops that sell rattan based products, which could be the only visible link of craft to forest resources, although we were assured that the rattan is not wild rattan but what is cultivated for this purpose.

There are also attempts of Isinay teachers to include Isinay language instruction in the curriculum. This is done informally in the summer months and has not yet been formalized in schools.. The Isinay language is one of the endangered languages of the country. It is moribund as only the elders can speak the language fluently and the young generation speaks either in Ilocano or Filipino (Tagalog) and English in schools.

2. In the same regard, we could safely assume that there are no strong linkages of the traditional ikat weaving with what grows and flourishes in the natural environment and forested areas. The principal materials for traditional ikat weaving are cotton and indigo, both of which need to be cultivated in available farm areas or fields that may be available to the community. While unable to ascertain the kind of forest conservation that would be possible, further study may be needed. One key element that is available, however, is the interest of the communities to explore what is available in their natural environment.
3. While it was hoped that we would be able to start working with the communities in outlining a framework for a circular economy using the ikat weaving tradition as an entry point, this is a process that could not be done within the time frame allowed by the scoping project. Below is a proposal that would have served as a starting point for a discussion, should it have taken place. It is, however, possible to accomplish this through a series of orientation and planning workshops. The reason that we feel strongly about this is because of the expressed needs of the communities we met with in Dupax del Sur, Bambang and especially in Aritao where the community now has regained its rights to their ancestral domain since the CADT application in 2012. In fact, Dr. Salvador

Amores has introduced basic weaving techniques to the Aritao community. She has brought them some table looms to introduce the interaction of warp and weft threads to create a textile. This process is highly recommended with the collaboration of the communities involved, the Local Government Units and the provincial DENR and other government agencies in tandem with CORDITEX and other NGOs.

### ***Who are the Isinay?***

The Isinay is known for their *uwes pinutuan* (dyed ikat blanket). The textile historian Robyn Maxwell (1990, 78) describes the Isinay blanket as:

“one of the few examples of large warp ikat designs remaining from the island of Luzon. Nothing is known of the design’s exact original meaning, although the large hooked motifs are similar to those identified by the art historian Schuster (1965:342) as ‘genealogical patterns’, a succession of deceased ancestors.”

The blanket is known as a death blanket. It is also known as a traveling blanket and was highly valued by the neighboring indigenous communities in the Cordillera. The fact that the Isinay Ikat blanket holds its place in various international collections speaks of its intrinsic and cultural value. The symbolism of its design requires further study and this would rest on knowing more about the culture of the ancient Isinay, their belief system and practices.<sup>2</sup> This could be the subject of further study and research. The Isinay, it is said, had a high level of civilization in pre-Hispanic times.

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<sup>2</sup> We are currently in conversation with our UK partner, Dr. Emily Pott of the Prince’s Foundation School of Traditional Arts in the regard.

The Isinay, as currently described by the National Commission of Culture and the Arts (NCCA) are a small group currently found principally in Bambang and Dupax in Nueva Vizcaya (Figure 1: Map). The same document states that “since the area is linked with the major transportation arteries that connect southern and northern Luzon, and thus exposed to intensive trade, cultural change is highly advanced and much of the traditional culture is gone.” More interestingly, this NCCA entry points out to theories on the Isinay country being one of the staging areas for the migration of the Isinay people to the Ifugao highlands. Field research in Asipulo in Kiangan, Ifugao also yielded information from the elders that there is an evidence of intermarriage between the Isinay and Ifugao, and the possibility of shared tradition on ikat-weaving.

Furthermore, the Isinay is one of the oldest Central Cordillera languages, however, the language is moribund. Only the elder Isinay speaks the language, and the younger ones either speak in Filipino (Tagalog) or Ilocano; and English are spoken in schools. Furthermore, the Isinay community carried out initiatives in saving their language through teaching the Isinay languages every summer, Isinay elders in Aritao also until now are teaching Isinay language to young children. Teachers in elementary schools also require their students to research on Isinay culture that has relations to Isinay food, culture, plants, practices, songs and legends. The compilation are kept in schools as a reference for Isinay culture.

Isinay communities also attempted to revive the Isinay native attire (*bado*) by commissioning weavers to create blue and white attire for them. Jeannie Laccay who started weaving was commissioned to weave Isinay native attire that were used during cultural festivals in the different municipalities. Recently, the participation of the Isinay in the ikat weaving workshop in Kiangan, Ifugao to relearn, reweave and revive the process is one of the major achievement of the scoping study, i.e. revival of the ikat weaving and Jeannie Laccay, an Isinay weaver’s return to Dupax del Sur, and her commitment to continue the ikat weaving tradition in Dupax.

## Scoping Findings

The main research question for the scoping grant is: How relevant is the revival of traditional ikat weaving in restoring Isinay cultural identity; and to motivate the communities to restore and conserve their natural resources, and plan for a more inclusive and sustainable development?

The research question is further divided to the following objectives:

**1. To validate the importance of ikat weaving tradition as an asset in the Isinay's cultural heritage and its interdependence with community skills and values in the management and conservation of their natural resources, environment, and ecosystems.**

Much of the meaning of the Isinay blanket was lost as the people of greater Dupax were converted to Christianity. The last Isinay ikat blanket woven by Felipa Mayangat Castillo can be found in the Church of San Vicente Ferrer in Dupax del Sur. It was woven in the 1980s. In our visit in April 2022, the ikat blanket was not on display for either the parishioners, residents, or visitors to see. The church authorities had kept it in storage with other church paraphernalia. We were eventually allowed to view the blanket. It was not properly stored and certainly not befitting the status for such a work of art. While this first experience of encountering the Isinay Ikat blanket was disheartening the rest of our visit in Dupax was lightened by the interest and enthusiasm we met among a small group of Isinay Advocates. They could be the vanguard in the revival of Isinay culture and deepen the understanding of their outstanding heritage and traditions.

In the same visit to Dupax in April 2022, Dr. Salvador-Amores introduced us to Jeannie Laccay, weaver; her brother Mark, and Alvin Felix, an academic and researcher from the Nueva Vizcaya State University. They are members of the Isinay Advocates, Inc., who together with a group of other young Isinay are becoming aware of their cultural

heritage and bringing back to life what they can, including the retrieval of local Isinay language on plant names, culture and indigenous practices through a Language Documentation Project. Isinay culture, along with its language is also an endangered language (moribund): the last Isinay speakers are the elders, and recent efforts to teach the language to the young generation are undertaken through a documentation of the language and a community dictionary. The Isinay Community Dictionary project is in collaboration with linguist, Dr. Lawrence Reid; and other Isinay language Documentation by the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino (KWF). Another project is on the research and documentation of traditional medicinal plants of the region in collaboration with the Department of Health's (DOH) Philippine Traditional Alternative Health Care (PITAHC) and Nueva Vizcaya State University.

### *Jeannie Laccay and Isinay weaving*

Jeannie Laccay is a young mother and a self-taught weaver who used an upright or foot loom. She began by weaving baby carriers (*oban*) and grew a community of mothers who -like her - preferred to carry their child in a wraparound cloth that was designed to be “ergonomically correct”. Jeannie had grown up in Metro Manila and would only return to Dupax del Sur in the summers. Her father is Isinay and her mother is Ilocano, and it was only recently that her sense of being Isinay has grown and deepened. Spending more time in Dupax during the pandemic and lockdown, Jeannie was able to set up a weaving workshop/ center. She sought the support of the local government and was able to gather twelve (12) weavers ages from 18 to 65. The local government also helped her procure a few looms to start with through DTI.



Mary Ann Portillo arranges warp threads at the weaving studio in Dupax del Sur.



Jeannie Laccay shows a client how to wrap around a traditional Isinay skirt.

### *Conversations on the Traditional Arts of the Isinay*

In conversations with residents of Dupax del Sur, Aritao and Bambang, there seemed to be a gap in their recollections about the Ikat Isinay blanket. None of those we spoke with had any recollection of the production nor the use of the blanket. Some did remember earlier textiles which were used for skirts and blouses and used in special occasions. As we explored the materials that were used in their clothing, an Isinay elder and former IPMR (Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative), Abe Reyes recalled a textile fiber akin to *abaca* or *piña*. This was later identified as *maguey*. A group of community leaders in Aritao had little recollection but remembered *maguey* as a Christmas ornament. In Bambang, the community of senior leaders did recall the customary traditional attire worn on special occasions but not much more. They tried

to remember who amongst them, or their relatives may have kept some of these textile heirlooms.

What was most encouraging in a series of conversations with these groups of quite urbanized Isinay descendants and residents of greater Dupax is that they are all interested in reviving knowledge of their cultural heritage. In Aritao, where the community leader and IPMR, Bayani La Rosa proudly informed us that they had just been awarded their CADT after almost fifteen (15) years since they had filed their application. This prospect has allowed the community leaders to turn their dreams into reality.

## Isinai IPs get 11.5K-hectare ancestral land after nearly 15 years



(Photo courtesy of NCIP-Nueva Vizcaya)

**ARITAO, Nueva Vizcaya** – The Isinai indigenous people here finally got their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) covering more than 11,000 hectares after almost 15 years of waiting.

The approved CADT has total a land area of 11,586.4081 hectares covering 16 barangays of Aritao town, a barangay of Dupax Del Sur town, and a portion of Barangay Meusan in Bambang town, all in Nueva Vizcaya, lawyer Roderick Iquín, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples-Nueva Vizcaya acting provincial officer told the Philippine News Agency on Friday.

NCIP chair Allen Capuyan and other commissioners, in a full-court session, earlier deliberated and approved the title with 20 Isinai leaders led by head petitioner Edgar Licwetyn Daniel.

By Villamor Visaya, Jr.



December 17, 2021, 2:21 pm

"With the undying vision of the community, the waiting is over and the journey has just begun for the Isinai indigenous cultural communities of Aritao in Nueva Vizcaya. Their grassroots struggles and sacrifices were significantly paid off as they will celebrate the spirit of Christmas with gratitude in their hearts," Iquín added.

Isinai elder Krussela Abiva has been ecstatic with the approval of their title after a long time.

"At last, we got ours," she said, recalling their journey in fighting for their rights to ancestral domain and the collective effort undertaken to turn this dream into reality.

The Isinays directly filed their CADT application on Jan. 6, 2007 and was approved on December 16.

The project involves PHP904,560 with 2,255 ancestral domain rights holders.

Iquín added that based on gathered documents, the Isinai have been first seen roaming Aritao and until now, "they have a unique culture of their own". (PNA)

Since our visit in Aritao in April, Dr. Salvador-Amores has provided table looms for the women in Aritao to expose them to the basics of weaving. One of the projects that may be considered here would be a combination of values education and appreciation of cultural heritage, weaving and dyeing skills development, an agro-forestry project as suggested by Charles Castro where the plant resources can be propagated, and care of the land and the forest fostered. This would tie in well in the aftermath of the recent Ikat Weaving Workshop held in Kiangan, Ifugao last July 14-17,

2022, as described below. It is also an excellent opportunity for encouraging young men and women to be involved, a plan that Dr. Salvador-Amores is already initiating in an informal basis.

### *Ikat Weaving Workshop*

In July, Dr. Salvador-Amores and Marlon Martin of the Save Ifugao Terraces Movement (SITMO) organized an Ikat Weaving Workshop at the Indigenous Peoples Education Center (IPED) in Kiangan, Ifugao. A process of learning that could take a lifetime, the workshop was abbreviated and conducted in four days to give the participants a taste of traditional ikat weaving on backstrap looms under the guidance of the master weavers of Kiangan. This event started out as an exchange between Isinay and Ifugao, whose relationship is inextricably linked by the “threads that bind”. While the ikat technique is within Ifugao, it is only in the last ten years that ikat weaving was revived and relearned through the gathering of elders who had a recollection of the process, the use of archival and historical documents wherein ikat weaving was shared from the Isinay, the most excellent ikat weavers of the time. The Ifugao eventually excelled in the craft. The Isinay eventually lost their ikat weaving tradition while the Ifugao continued. Eventually, in the years of World War II, the weaving stopped in Ifugao. It was only some seven years ago, the ikat weaving was once again restored in Ifugao and in these few years, they have excelled and now are able to give back to the Isinay.

Not all the Isinay weavers in Jeannie’s Laccay’s workshop in Dupax del Sur were able to attend. Jeannie came with her assistant Mary Ann Portilla, *Isinay*, and a 16 year old girl, Beverly Castro, a resident of Dupax del Sur who is not Isinay but *Bugkalot*. The Bugkalot, also known as Ilongot, are traditionally neighbors of the Isinay. They do not weave. They embroider and many of their work is seen as embellishment of Isinay weaves, though not ikat weaves.

Prior to the workshop, Dr. Salvador-Amores was visited by Ana Cadwising, *Kankana-ey* weaver from Bauko, Mountain Province, whose mother, Francisca Galactic, had

learned to weave the blanket, albeit as a death blanket, from the Isinays in Dupax. The textile that she wove was called “*tinina ti Isinay*” (tie dyed Isinay) with reference to the Isinay weavers such as Felipa Mangayat Castillo. Ana joined the workshop. Kat Palasi, descendant of an *Ibaloy* woman who featured in a well-known archival photograph beside an Isinay ikat blanket, surfaced in the consciousness of the organizers as did Cathy Ekid Domigyay from Bontoc. The Bontoc also had an ikat funerary cloth called *inewes* worn by the *backnang*, affluent class in Bontoc society. But they are no longer woven nowadays. The Isinay, Kankanaey and Bontoc had their roots to ikat weaving in the past. They all took part in this auspicious gathering and received guidance from Marlon Martin, Benita Balangto, master weaver, and her team including Divina Calingayan, Marcelino Bumilac, Stephanie Ayahao, and Jenelyn Olanigan from the Kiyangan Weavers Association (KIWA) in Kiangan, Ifugao.



**FIGURE 3:** Photograph of an Ibaloy woman with the blanket as a background. In the early 1900s, the blanket would have cost 25 pesos, equivalent to five *carabaos* (water buffaloes). Photograph by Dean C. Worcester, with permission from the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan.

Archival photograph of Kat Palasi's ancestor.

The participants learned the processes involved in warping on a back strap loom, tying, dyeing, drying, re-warping after dyeing, and weaving. Some of the participants had not woven on a back strap loom before, and there were a few who were learning how to weave for the first time.

Here in what might be considered as the heartland of the Ifugao, one could ponder on the relevance of the revival of traditional ikat weaving in restoring Isinay cultural identity. Historically or even symbolically, Isinay and Ifugao are intertwined in more ways than one. The more obvious link comes with the shared knowledge in indigo ikat weaving.

More specifically the event brought together weavers coming from the places where the Isinay Ikat Traveling Blanket had been highly valued as the most exquisite weave of cotton threads that were enhanced by the indigo dye. One can get a sense of how different indigenous communities in the Cordilleras began to “own” the traveling blanket, to name them as their own. What for the Isinay is *uwes pinutuan*, the Ibaloy and the Kankana-ey is *adashang* or *alladang*. The Ifugao call it *kinuttiyan*, the other ikat blanket is *inladdang*.



Uwes Pinutuan, Isinay,  
Photo courtesy of the Ayala Museum



Kinuttiyan, Ifugao, woven by Angelina Buhle  
Photo courtesy of the Ayala Museum



Adashang/ Alladang, Ibaloy or Kankanaey  
Photo courtesy of the Ayala Museum

The cultural exchange that ensued on those three days in July was centered on the Ifugao and Isinay but gently expanded to a process of reflecting and revisiting one’s cultural heritage and tradition beyond specific ethnicity. It also became an exercise in how one might apply the same process in whichever tradition needs to emerge and grow and become relevant in the present moment.

## 2. To demonstrate the strong linkages of traditional ikat weaving with what grows and flourishes in the natural environment and forested areas.

The clearest indication of how closely interlinked traditional arts are with the forest came towards the end of our scoping activity. This came in two separate conversations. The first one was with Marlon Martin, Ifugao culture bearer. The second one was with Charles Castro, Isinay, ex-forester from Dupax. Listening to these men who treasure their heritage and who have experienced a closeness with the forests gives new light in the research and study of the revival of the traditional arts. The conversation with Martin was very well contextualized. It took place on the third day of the weaving workshop in Kiangan.

The conversation with Castro was held two days after the workshop in the setting of the Museo Kordilyera, University of the Philippines Baguio.

The Isinay and the Ifugao are very closely related. The writings on Isinay cite instances of intermarriage between Isinay and Ifugao (Salvador-Amores, 2018). Martin observed that all the features of the Isinay village are found in an archaeological site in Asipulo, Ifugao, not far from Bambang in Nueva Vizcaya. Here, he says the houses face a plaza citing the advanced civilization of the Isinay in pre-Hispanic times. Ikat weaving may also have started in Asipulo with the Ifugao loincloth or *tinowé* and the *kinuttiyan* blanket very similar to those of the Isinay. This is a subject that can be explored in further research, including the excavation of the town.

Highlights of the Ikat Weaving Workshop



## The Ifugao and Kiangan's Forest System

Martin unfolded stories on the linkage of forest, rice terraces, culture, community, values, and life. “It’s an entire system”, he says. “You cannot separate the forest from the rice terraces. It’s an entire cycle. Weaving is done after working in the fields; men do the basketry after going into the forest”. Environment, culture, community, and community values are

inseparable. He speaks about the disconnectedness of the modern school system with heritage education. He and his group started projects to take the children out of school to get to know the forests for themselves, not from

the books assigned in their schools which present a more Western outlook. The trees in the Ifugao forests have names that the children would do well in remembering, their own indigenous taxonomy that adds value to knowing more about their heritage.

“We can sustain the forest”, Martin says, “There is a bike trail that goes through the forest” a trail that starts from the rice terraces that were built next to Kiyangan’s Indigenous Peoples Education Center or IPED. When schools did not allow children to visit the rice terraces, Martin and his group proposed that if the children cannot go to the terraces, the terraces will come to the children. They constructed the rice terraces in — — Before going into the forest, the children planted rice in the terraces and familiarized themselves with an Ifugao tradition and way of life. The rice terraces led to the forest.



Marlon Martin gives the opening remarks at the Ikat Weaving Workshop in Kiangan last 15 July.



The rice terraces that were built in the Indigenous Peoples Education Center (IPED) that opens up to a forested area behind and where children an experience both.

Original trails in the forests of Kiyangan have opened new vistas to a younger generation who now use them as bike trails, allowing them to get to know the forest firsthand. Bike rides in forest trails and activities in the rice terraces could be the start of engaging them in contributing to an Ifugao Ethnographic Encyclopedia that would open their eyes even more widely as they discover the relationship of what they find in the rice terraces and the forest with the rest of their universe.

While the area of this scoping project does not necessarily include the Ifugao, it is the kind of mindset and experience that is found there that could serve as a model for Isinay.

## The Isinay and Dupax

Charles Castro echoes the same sentiments that Martin expresses when speaking about an entire system where the forests and the rice terraces, growing cotton, wood carving, basket making, and weaving are interlinked. The metaphor that guides Charles in his ecological and systems thinking is that of the spider's web.

### NOTES FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES CASTRO (NOTED BY ISSAY RODRIGUEZ)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• compartmentalized planting can be applied in hilly lands to accommodate a mix of edible and textile related plants through modified terrace farming / peripheral farming</li> <li>• encourage organic / chemical free farming and fallow system</li> <li>• plant these from foot to hilltop tayum, avocado, linga, kamote, sunflowers, maguey, peanuts, cotton, and other fruit-bearing trees for beehives and birds (guava, bignay, duhat, sinigueles, kasuy)</li> <li>• mango - not for upland farming but used for dyes</li> <li>• maguey - survives arid soil; ideal for planting 'green breaks'; is a good fire retardant / 'firewall'; can also be cultivated as home decor 🌿</li> <li>• tayum (indigo plant) - has trade connections with India, China and Mexico, is a nitrogen-fixing fertilizer</li> <li>• rattan - harvest during July to September</li> <li>• bayabas - survives any dry areas</li> </ul>
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7 Interview with Charles Castro, 19 July 2022, Baguio City

The restoration or regeneration of the forests should begin with the community for which, he says, education and values formation is necessary. This should include an appreciation of the textile heritage and its linkages with nature. Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) can be grown in the forest as well as rattan, not only

for its vine but for its fruit, which is medicinal and nutritious. He encourages agro-

forestry, growing fruit trees and food crops. These activities could provide a source of livelihood for the community. All these are interconnected and should be understood at such.

Charles Castro had been living in the United States and returned recently to visit with his family in Baguio. He recounted how he had met Dr. Salvador-Amores in 2011, when she was just starting to do her research on the Isinay Ikat Blanket. According to him, she one day entered her class and asked if any of the students had any knowledge of or relationship with the Isinay. Castro's daughter immediately responded and arranged to introduce her father to Dr. Salvador-Amores. He since has accompanied Dr. Salvador-Amores on research trips.



Charles Castro sketches his ideas on a notebook



Castro's illustration of the spider web.

The Dupax he knew included Aritao and Bambang as barrios. Of the forests, he remembers seeing maguey, a plant of the *Agave genus*, growing in the periphery of the forests. While hoping to hear about cotton or *Indigofera tinctoria* or other flora found in the forest, he continued to extol on some of the virtues of the maguey plant. It was a good fire retardant in the hills and forests, prevented soil erosion, and with its thorny leaves kept stray animals away. Maguey seems to occupy a major part of the memory of Dupax's elderly citizens. Mr. Abe Reyes, an 81-year-old gentleman in Dupax remembers it as a textile fiber like abaca. He also remembers using the Maguey plant as a substitute for a Christmas tree.

Castro continued his account on how Dupax through massive logging activities was borne of its forests in the 1950's. These were the same forests where the people known as Isinay or "*Inmaes*" had retreated to avoid conversion to Christianity; the same forests that most feared to tread lest they come across headhunters. In better times, the forests were a source of tree bark for dye material, of climbing bamboo and rattan, of bees wax and honey. The beeswax was an essential material for ikat

weaving, or wax resist dyeing. The bees, locally known as *uyukan* are known to be ferocious to humans and are known to chase farm animals like the carabao, perhaps a reason that they are no longer propagated.

Castro had no direct account of Isinay weaving. His references were mostly those of Ilocos weaving including the processing of cotton, which he described in detail. He, however, is encouraging about the growing of cotton, indigo, and other materials related to the backstrap loom weaving that is traditional to Isinay ikat weaving.

### **Visit at the Dupax Watershed**

While expectations of a forest visit may have been dim prior to our field trip to Dupax, a morning at the Dupax Watershed Forest Reserve was a pleasant surprise. It was lush, verdant, and beautiful, and the waters of the river that ran across refreshing. Alvin Felix and Mark Laccay accompanied us and provided some information and direction. Alvin pointed to a plant whose stalk can be used for basket making. Mark, on the other hand, mentioned a reforestation project in an area at the top of Mt. San Vicente which was open for collaboration between the government and the private sector.



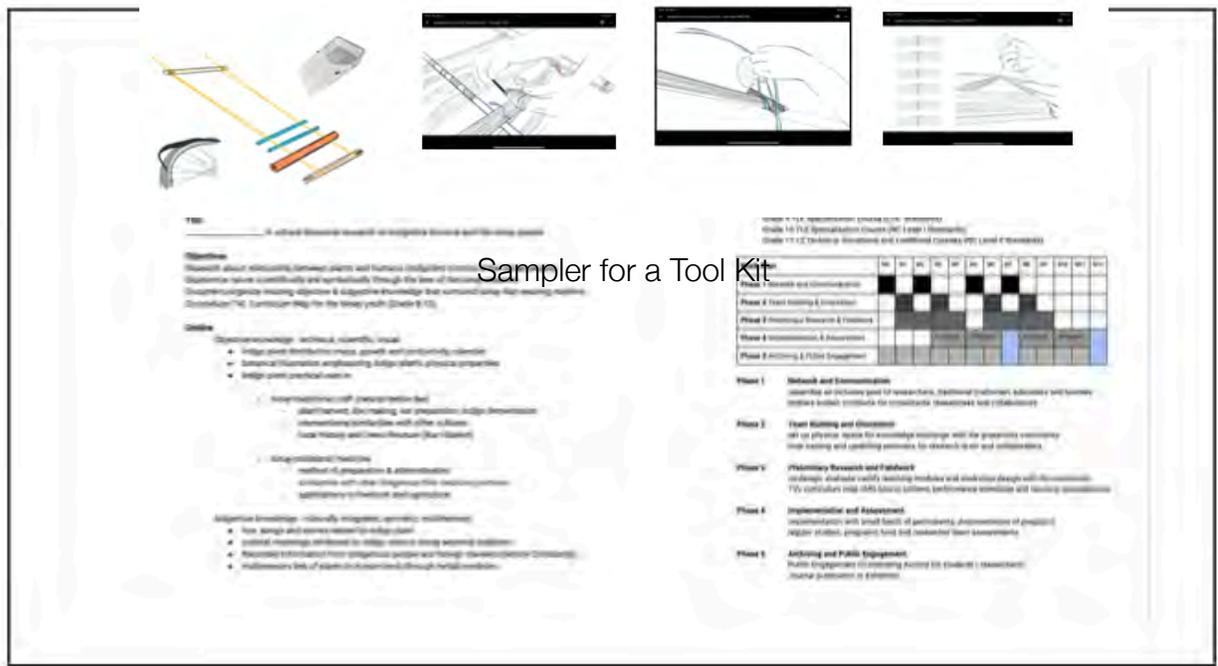
This watershed area shows a great potential for bringing to the awareness of the citizens how a forest ecosystem might work. A visit should be integrated in any educational program that may be instituted in the future. Perhaps some indigo may be planted to demonstrate the possibilities.



We were shown a public recreational area with ample facilities suitable for organizing an educational event, a workshop, perhaps, or a fundraising event to support an initiative to sustain the watershed area or expand the forest. One idea might be to dedicate an area for reforestation or as a farm/ garden for growing indigo and dye-yielding and medicinal plants.

**3. To document (for eventual publication and design of online educational modules) the process of revival and transitions from traditional to contemporary use.**

This is still a work in progress. A video documentation of the Ikat Weaving Workshop held in Kiangon, Ifugao on July 15-17 is being organized and will be a resource in the design of online educational modules. Apart from the weaving process, other educational materials encouraging discovery and understanding of the value of indigo tinctoria, not only as a dye material but for its medicinal and agricultural uses has been drafted for possible development. Below is an outline we commissioned for this purpose.



**4. To outline with the communities involved a framework for development that promotes a circular economy (using the ikat weaving tradition as an entry point).**

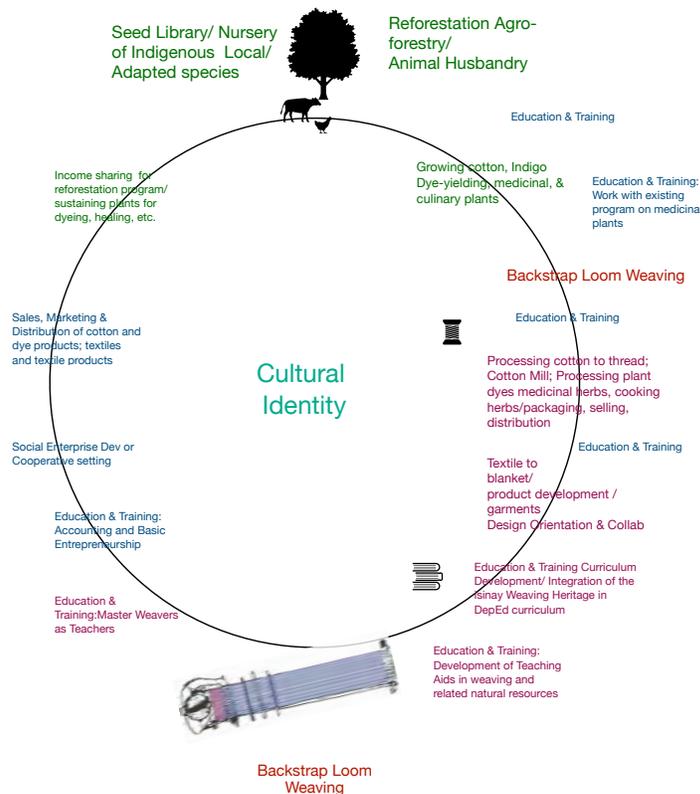
Dr. Salvador-Amores has initiated discussions with a group of community leaders in Aritao for a weaving workshop. She has delivered some table looms to orient and familiarize members of the community in basic weaving. Should their enthusiasm grow, an expanded program can be designed for community members as well as schoolteachers for an integrative approach to an education in Isinay cultural heritage and patrimony that will make the citizenry aware of the values of their heritage, their community and their land, their environmental assets, and help them think forward in translating these into activities that will sustain them and future generations. The

program could be modeled after the IPED in Kiangan and the approach proposed by Charles Castro on agro-forestry and terrace farming. (See above).

As a major initiative, this should begin with a consultation with the community and local government and agencies to establish a framework for development and should be supported by organizations such as the British Council and the Forest Foundation and similar. This event should be in the same spirit as that of the aforementioned Ikat Weaving Workshop in Kiangan: one of sharing a tradition, not as a cultural heirloom for one's particular community but one that binds a broader community with a shared vision of tradition and continuity and who are true to their identity.

### Proposal for a Circular Economy on the Regrowing of Forests & the Revival of Isinay Ikat Weaving

Oikos= Home/ Oikonomia= Home Economics



## ***Post Script***

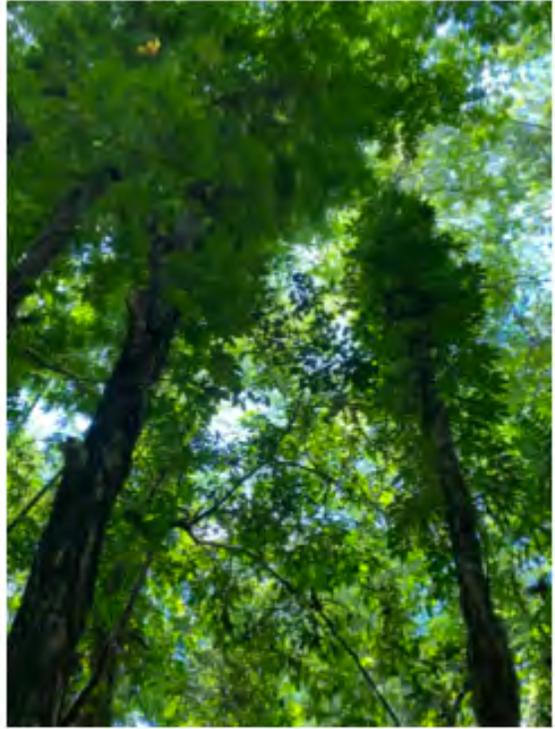
The story of the sharing of the ikat Weaving Tradition from Isinay to Ifugao and back again to Ifugao is so compelling. More than any political mantra on unity, it is a harbinger for the coming together of communities that may still be divided politically though not culturally. Ikat is a Malay word that means “ties that bind.”

HABI the Philippine Textile Council, through its President, was moved by this gathering and is producing a film documentary to demonstrate the merits of threads that bind to inspire our local and indigenous communities to continue to weave their future and to remind cultural and educational institutions to support these communities in their endeavor.

Before she left Kiangnan to return home to Dupax, Marlon Martin asked to see Jeannie Laccay. As a parting gift, he gave her the seedling of an indigo plant to mark a new beginning at home. This indigo has come a long way. It originally came to the Philippines from Vietnam through Kat Palasi, a natural dye specialist. Kat shared some with Dr. Salvador-Amores who in turn shared some with Marlon. It is enlightening to know how the arts and culture can be the gentlest and most affirming facilitator for a new kind of development, one that begins with the soil and seeds and that can grow a forest



Jeannie Laccay with indigo plant for her homecoming



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