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SHE SAID SHE SAID

STORIES OF COURAGE AND HEROISM OF
INDIGENOUS WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



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INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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SHE SAID SHE SAID



An Intergenerational Story Telling among Indigenous Women Human Rights Defenders

Since the Duterte administration in 2016, human rights activists and defenders have been under threat, harassed, and have been killed and made to disappear. This comes at a time when land grabbing among indigenous communities has intensified, investment projects, particularly mining and mega dams, within ancestral domains are being fast-tracked, without due process of free, prior, and informed consent; and food sovereignty is increasingly becoming a survival issue. While there are acts of resistance and activism among indigenous communities, fear among them is a big challenge to overcome. There is an increased presence of military and other armed groups in the areas, and there are policies passed by the Duterte government that directly limit the democratic space.

It is then strategic to document the stories of indigenous women who have been actively defending the land and the rights of their communities – their experiences, fears, and aspirations for themselves, for their families, and their people. These stories will remind themselves, and their communities of their courage, and the strength of their commitment. And in these times of fear, their stories will provide inspiration to the young women, who in their own space, and mode, are indigenous women human rights defenders themselves. Moreover, the young women's share of stories of courage will provide hope to the rest of the communities, and all the other women struggling as they defend their rights and their futures. In these times where actions of activism are deemed acts of terrorism and subversion, the story-telling process between the young women and their elders is a moment of organizing and mentoring.

Witness and celebrate the stories of courage, commitment, and sheroism of indigenous women in defending their land, territories, communities, and their rights as indigenous women. Immerse in the stories told by the Teduray and Lambangian from Upi, Maguindanao, Higaonon from Cagayan de Oro, and Tawali indigenous women and young women from Didipio, Nueva Viscaya. Padayon!



CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

THE STORY OF TEDURAY INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER REBECCA LUCENA MOKUDEF

REBECCA LUCENA MOKUDEF

“We did nothing except move houses to avoid conflict. We evacuated the forests or wherever we originally came from to go anywhere we could escape from the turmoil.”



I am Rebecca Saliling Lucena-Mokudef, a member of the Teduray tribe born on July 6, 1956, in Barangay Mirab Upi, Maguindanao. I am the third out of the five children of G. Pablo Paguilidan Lucena and Gng. Wanita Recardo Saliling.

My past life experiences have not been easy. In the year 1965, I was nine years old and I vividly remember wanting to go to school to learn because I saw my

playmates on their way to school. However, I couldn't do this because of my parents. Back then, my parents did not want me to go outside and wander to different places. Because I am a woman, I was expected to stay at home and help out with household chores. But because of my desire to learn, I went with my neighbors to learn. I didn't have slippers, nor any school supplies like papers or pencils. With the help of my classmates, I was able to borrow paper and pencils so that I could follow the activities at school. My parents found out that I was studying. They saw how happy I was in my studies and how interested I was in what I was doing so they soon became happy for me as well. In truth, when I finished my fourth grade at Carlos Palindac Primary School, I won first honor.

Eventually, I matured into a young woman. As a woman, I was prohibited by my parents to be seen with a boy. They would hide me whenever a foreigner visited our community.

In 1971, before Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in the Philippines, a couple of foreigners—Christians from Manila and Iloilo—led by Filiciano Luces, alias “Kumander Toothpick”. This is when the conflict started in our once quiet and peaceful community. Kumander Toothpick’s group resided in Bantek, Upi Maguindanao, where we lived. Many of our Teduray tribe were killed. Some were made slaves.

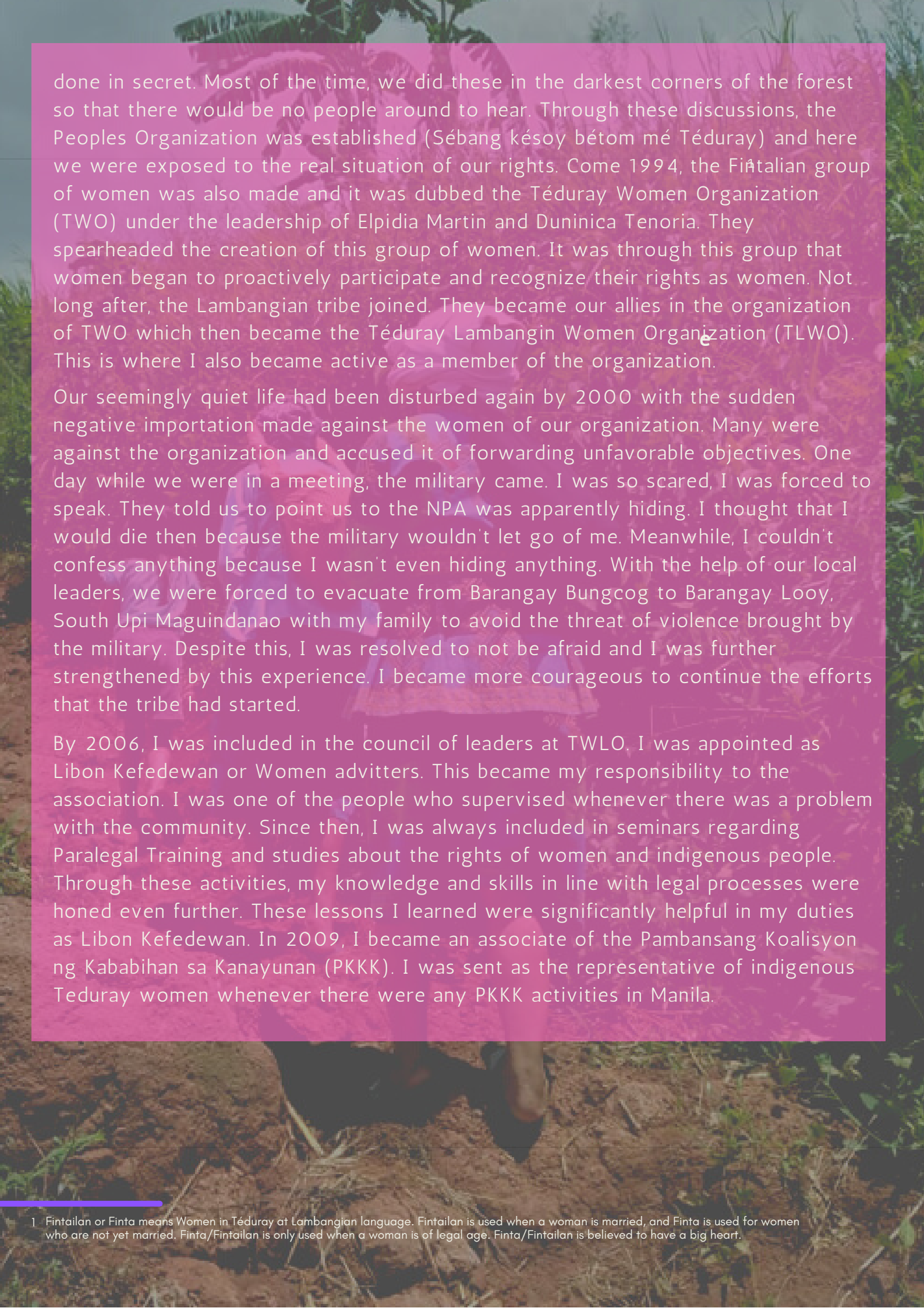
I was intended to become Kumander Toothpick’s wife—his twentieth wife. Brought by the intense fear and the threat of the death of my parents, they were forced to marry me off to the son of their comrade despite me being a minor. I was married without my consent. I thought back then that marriage was a game. It was unclear to me what life with a family meant. The unrest in our community did not wane and because of intense fear, we were forced to evacuate without our belongings or food just to avoid any further conflict.

Ako ay binalak na gawing asawa ni Kumander Toothpick – ika-dalawampung asawa. Dala na rin ng matinding takot at mga pagbabanta sa buhay ng aking mga magulang ay napilitan silang ipakasal ako sa anak ng kanilang kakilala kahit ako ay wala pa sa wastong edad. Nakapag-asawa ako ng labag sa aking kalooban. Akala ko noon ang pagaasawa ay laro lamang. Hindi pa malinaw sa akin kung ano ang ibig sabihin ng buhay may pamilya. Hindi pa rin natigil ang kagulugan sa aming lugar at dala ng matinding takot ay napilitan kaming lumikas nang walang mga dalang kagamitan o pagkain upang makaiwas sa gulo.

“We were always displaced. Even back then, my eyes were opened to the experiences of indigenous people.”

From 1971 to 1979, we did nothing except move houses to avoid conflict. We evacuated the forests or wherever we originally came from to go anywhere we could escape from the turmoil. We experienced all hardships. I wasn't able to continue my studies because of the chaos that armed groups brought to our community. We weren't able to work in our fields. We were always displaced. Even back then, my eyes were opened to the experiences of indigenous people. If I look back at that time, the government used its powers wrongly to perpetuate violence.

In 1989, the group LUMAD (Soodoray bétom mé Teduray) was born from different members of the Teduray tribe. This marked the beginning of the organizing of our community. Our goal was to communicate and inform our tribes of their different rights as indigenous people. Because of security issues, our discussions were always



done in secret. Most of the time, we did these in the darkest corners of the forest so that there would be no people around to hear. Through these discussions, the Peoples Organization was established (Sébang késoy bétom mé Téduray) and here we were exposed to the real situation of our rights. Come 1994, the Fintailan group of women was also made and it was dubbed the Téduray Women Organization (TWO) under the leadership of Elpidia Martin and Duninica Tenoria. They spearheaded the creation of this group of women. It was through this group that women began to proactively participate and recognize their rights as women. Not long after, the Lambangian tribe joined. They became our allies in the organization of TWO which then became the Téduray Lambangin Women Organization (TLWO). This is where I also became active as a member of the organization.

Our seemingly quiet life had been disturbed again by 2000 with the sudden negative importation made against the women of our organization. Many were against the organization and accused it of forwarding unfavorable objectives. One day while we were in a meeting, the military came. I was so scared, I was forced to speak. They told us to point us to the NPA was apparently hiding. I thought that I would die then because the military wouldn't let go of me. Meanwhile, I couldn't confess anything because I wasn't even hiding anything. With the help of our local leaders, we were forced to evacuate from Barangay Bungcog to Barangay Looy, South Upi Maguindanao with my family to avoid the threat of violence brought by the military. Despite this, I was resolved to not be afraid and I was further strengthened by this experience. I became more courageous to continue the efforts that the tribe had started.

By 2006, I was included in the council of leaders at TWLO. I was appointed as Libon Kefedewan or Women advitters. This became my responsibility to the association. I was one of the people who supervised whenever there was a problem with the community. Since then, I was always included in seminars regarding Paralegal Training and studies about the rights of women and indigenous people. Through these activities, my knowledge and skills in line with legal processes were honed even further. These lessons I learned were significantly helpful in my duties as Libon Kefedewan. In 2009, I became an associate of the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK). I was sent as the representative of indigenous Teduray women whenever there were any PKKK activities in Manila.

¹ Fintailan or Finta means Women in Téduray at Lambangian language. Fintailan is used when a woman is married, and Finta is used for women who are not yet married. Finta/Fintailan is only used when a woman is of legal age. Finta/Fintailan is believed to have a big heart.



My activities for the tribe became my advocacies towards better ambitions for us. However, not everything was easy. Aside from the poverty and other problems, hurdles, and challenges that our community had to push through to achieve our goals, we experienced hardship in the assumption of our roles at home. My responsibilities were always a point of contention between me and my husband. In the abundance of activities and programs that I had to attend, I couldn't stay at home. However, I still continued my activities because I knew that it would contribute largely to the strengthening of the foundations of our tribe, the strengthening of the causes we were fighting for in the desire for a better life, a peaceful community, and the recognition of our rights as indigenous people. I allotted time to serve even in far-flung areas. I would travel long distances even without money just to serve my fellow tribe members. The fruits of my labor brought me nothing but happiness.

If there was anything I ever wanted to share with my fellow women Teduray and Lambanguan, even with the men in the tribe, or the following generations—it is our duties to continue and keep the teachings and regulations to ensure the systems of our community and the protection of our environment. Let us ensure that this will not be destroyed by anyone. Let us ensure that the traditions we have embedded become used to and assist in the perpetuation of the initiatives that were started by our leaders for our tribe. Let us push for the eradication of discrimination and the continuous recognition of our rights over ancestral lands. Let us not forget our savior "Abay baraktan" and the traditions at the start of the harvest season and offer kanduli.

The changes we may see over time and throughout society may cause us to forget the values, traditions, and laws of our tribe (Ukit / Kitab Tegudon). It is our responsibility to pass this on to the youth because they serve as the foundation of what we are fighting for - the protection of our ancestral lands (Fusaka Fantas). This is the connection of our lives. Nowadays, I am concerned because very few youths wear our traditional clothes such as the Fënligis. I also hear some are ashamed to wear it. This is why we must further showcase and remind the celebration of our culture and traditions as Teduray.

I am now sixty-six years old. I continue serving the tribe, especially as Women advitter, until I am still alive. While I still can and while I still have the strength, I make sure to continue what I have started to give guidance to my successors who will stand for and fight for our rights as indigenous people.

Many say that our happiest days in life happen when we are born. However, I believe that equally important is how we choose to live our lives and what experiences we build as indigenous people. This is one of the bases of how we can give importance to ourselves.



**REBECCA
LUCENA
MOKUDEF**

Rebecca Lucena Mokudef is an indigenous woman Teduray from South Upi, Maguindanao. She is a council leader of Teduray Lambagian Women Organization (TLWO), an organization for women Teduray-Lambagian that advances the rights of indigenous women.

CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

THE STORY OF TEDURAY INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER REBECCA LUCENA MOKUDEF

A REFLECTION BY RIZELL CAMPO ANDIL



Through our discussions, I was able to see in Nanay Rebecca's eyes or "Edëng Tëtëk" the sadness and pain while she was recounting her life stories. It was like her memories and all the negative experiences she went through came back to her. With tear-filled eyes, I become more invested in her story and experience. I realized that until now, the problems she mentioned still continue.

While I was listening and learning, I was also inspired and encouraged to face the great challenges that we were also facing as indigenous women.

I am Rizell Paguilidan Campo-Andil. I was born on August 2, 1991, in Barangay Renti, Upi, Maguindanao. At present, I live in sitio Palidac, Barangay Bungcog, Upi, Maguindanao.

When I was in elementary, I asked my mother, "Mama, you always leave us. Where do you always go?". She always answered that she had to attend an activity for women; trainings, and seminars. When she came home, she would tell us all about the things she had learned. Since then, I told myself that one day, I would also want to attend and join these activities that my mother was doing.

When I reached high school, we took a trip to my mother's town at Sitio Kenakar, Looy South Upi, Maguindanao. When we got there, we visited Fintalian Jennevie Paguilidan to attend the Peoples Organization Youth Assembly. It was there that I heard about and learned more information about our tribe. Since then, she always took me with her to activities, and surely but slowly, my knowledge also grew.

In the year 2010, I started schooling at Upi Agricultural School Provincial Technical Institute of Agriculture. It was here that my knowledge about traditions, cultures, and other things further developed. I became a member of the Teduray Youth Student Association (TYSA) and I was one of the chosen secretaries in the span of four years. Whenever I did not have class, I devoted my time to seminars and other studies by TYSA.

By 2016, I ventured to the Middle East to help out my parents and siblings. I worked there as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) for three years. I endured not being with my family. However, on December 25, 2019, my mother passed away. It was so painful to reach my mom only to find out she was dead. I was supposed to return to my employer by 2020, but because of the abundance of papers and long processes I had to go through, I did not go back.

In March 2020, while the entire world was in the middle of the pandemic, I thought to serve my tribe. Even though I was not in the country for three whole years, my love and goal to help my tribe did not leave my mind or heart.

Through the stories of Nanay Rebecca and other IP women leaders, I felt the hardship that they had to endure as indigenous women Teduray. I never experienced being an evacuee. However, stories like this one still remain a reality. I am in awe of Nanay Rebecca's bravery because, in the midst of what she was going through, she only strengthened her resolve to continue her advocacies to develop the better ambitions of our tribe.

I wish to follow anything that our former leaders have started. Who else will fight for the rights of Teduray and Lambangian, and our ancestral rights, if not the youth?

FIYO BAGI, MEUYAG!!!!



Creative Output

KAGĒY ĒNGGĒ AGĒWON (OUR EXPERIENCE) AN INDIGENOUS SONG BY RIZELL CAMPO ANDIL

Linggeng is an indigenous way of telling a story. It is a song composed by elders that originates in the Teduray traditional culture. Its lyrics usually narrate the daily life of Tedurays. According to the artist, only a few indigenous people know how to make one at present.

The artist utilized *linggeng* as a creative form to narrate the story of Rebecca Mokudef, a Teduray indigenous woman human rights defender. The song lyrics emphasized the courage and heroism of Mokudef as a young indigenous woman who experienced displacement and violence prior to and during Martial Law in the Philippines.

Rizell Campo Andil is a Teduray indigenous young woman leader based in Maguindanao. She is currently an active member of Inged Fintaelan, an indigenous women's organization.



To listen to the song, use this link: [CLICK HERE](#).

Kagëy änggë Agëwon

(Our Experience)

There are past instances that are kept alive by memories that
Until now remain engraved in
The minds of indigenous women, many
Seasons they have felt remorse for the denial of
Their education and the desire of
Their parents to greatly protect,
But in the end, she ends up
Marrying at a young age and without consent.

Awakened by places that are wrapped in fear
because of
Interference of fellow Filipinos that
Act like foreigners and because of the accompanied
Chaos, they move around to different homes.

But these things did not serve as hurdles
So that their lives may be
Discontinued, but instead even stronger and
Braver as an indigenous woman
Until she became a leader of
Women and became active in organizations

Chorus:
But in her awakening, she is a woman that cannot
Just give up, she will shout her
Rights and let the whole world know so that
She may be heard by those who act deaf

She will show her importance and her
Capabilities. She's a woman with rights

Past events uncovered and made right
Past moments that I wish I knew about the rights of
women and these were fought for

I realized when I became aware of this world, the life
I endure is difficult,
But because of my parents who serve as
My strength I was not shaken because I
Continue to work hard so that I may achieve an
education.

While I studied I forgot about the discrimination
about being indigenous
Thus this became the reason for me to further
continue my steadfastness so that
Discrimination may be put to an end

But regardless of all of this, I
Hope to put a stop to the violence
That we have endured from the past to the
present.

In my awareness, I have seen
Active youths for the tribes thus
I also became active in organizations where
I was made aware of the many youth and women
like me who make our rights known and the worth
of our tribes

I will help spread the idea that we are people who
have the right to live peacefully like you, I will shout
for our rights as indigenous people which we will
achieve.

Repeat chorus



MY BIOGRAPHY

THE STORY OF LAMBANGIAN INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER LINDA MIDAL



I vividly remember when I was five years old, my father and mother separated. I was left to the supervision of my father and only my grandmother took care of me and my siblings. We were impoverished and we did not have much money. My relatives had not been able to study and even my parents only knew how to farm as their primary source of income.

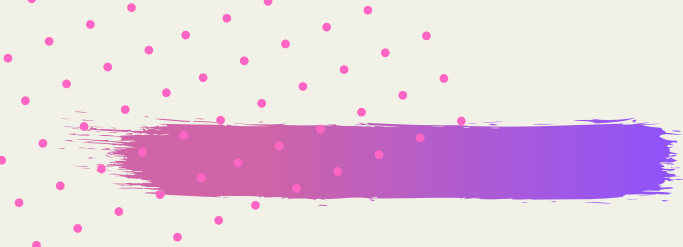
We were used to eating bananas and cassava every day. My siblings and I grew up without experiencing any sort of luxury.

Many years passed, my father married again and I gained more siblings. When I started schooling, I had to endure the abuse of my stepmother. One mistake and we would receive cruelty from my father's new wife. Whenever I asked for food, she would burn my palms. My father could not do anything because he simply followed and acquiesced to anything she would say.

This was a very difficult time for me. I would go to school with only a steamed banana for lunch. Sometimes my stomach would be empty. At noon, I would climb the guava trees and the fruits I got would be my lunch. I would only return to school at one in the afternoon because lessons would start. Life was so hard for us back then that I did not even have paper or pencils. Because I did not have the money to buy, I would befriend my classmates who were better off so that I could borrow paper and pencils from them.

When I reached the legal age, I tried to run away from my father and my family... I carried my bags and clothes and left with the intention of living alone. During this time, I did not have any belongings with me so I cooked using a can of sardines.

Not long after, a woman noticed me, gave me food, and brought me to her home. I stayed there for a long while and became a slave at a young age.



After a few years, I heard the news that my father and my stepmother parted ways. My father soon re-married, and I thought of going back to my father to help him in taking care of my siblings.

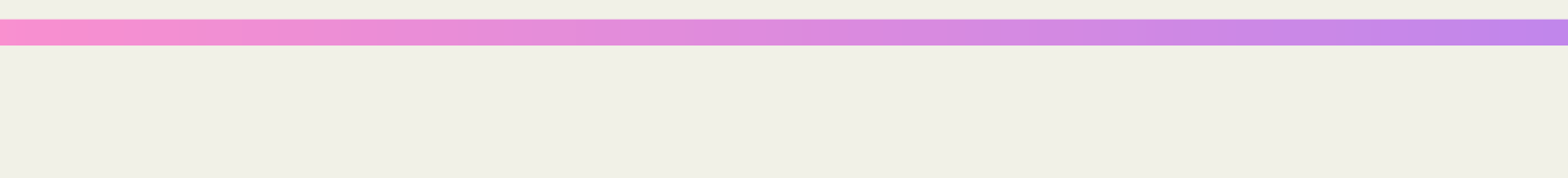
During this time, we experienced turmoil because we were invaded by armed groups in our community. Our homes were burnt, and our animals were stolen—along with the only carabao that belonged to my father. This became the reason for my father's sickness because it was difficult for him to be rid of his only source of income for himself and his family.



During this time, the chaos continued in our community. We would cry and hide because of the fear of being hit by bullets. Because our carabao was gone, life was even more difficult. We did not have anything to plow the lands. Even though we endured such difficulty, we remained in our community because we had nowhere else to go.

After months had passed, my father finally passed. I felt sad because my siblings were so small. I was the eldest among my ten other siblings. We were left at the hands of my father's third wife and we grew up and were used to working at ripe ages. We took different jobs to help with everyday expenses. Eventually, I made the decision to go to the city to continue my studies. I left my siblings under the care of my grandmother.

On my journey to the city, I searched for a place to stay. It was there that I juggled working and my studies until I finished elementary and high school.



I was able to marry and I had four children. I ensured that they would not experience what I experience before. During this time, I became active in our tribe until I was called Finta. Because of what we had experienced when they forcibly took our ancestral lands, we were required to be strong and active in the activities of our community. We needed to fight for our rights as indigenous people. Because of the different seminars that I had joined, my mind was also opened as a woman. I garnered a deeper understanding of my knowledge and I became a more steadfast mother. Because of my active participation in the activities of our communities, and the places I had been to, I never once thought of going anywhere that would require me to ride an airplane.



Until now, my life continues. I thank God that these bitter experiences are nothing but memories to me now. By the grace of God, I was able to endure at least. Until now, I will remain active in my responsibilities to my tribe.

LINDA MIDAL

Linda Mida is an indigenous woman Lambangian from Maguindanao. She is currently the Secretary General of Inged Fintailan, an organization for women Teduray-Lambangian that advances the rights of indigenous women.

MY BIOGRAPHY

A REFLECTION BY FEBY MIDAL



I am Feby Midal, born on February 12, 1997 at Sitio Kitol, Barangay Kuya, South Upi Maguindanao. I am the third of four of my siblings. We had a happy, bountiful, and quiet life because we were far from the city. The only sound we heard was the chirp of birds, and we were rich in environmental and natural resources. When I was five years old, we traveled to Poblacion

so that my siblings and I could study. I was not used to life in the city. This is why my first time in Poblacion I would not stop crying out of fear. This was my first time seeing cars because we did not have any of them in the mountains. We only had horses as our mode of transportation in the fields.

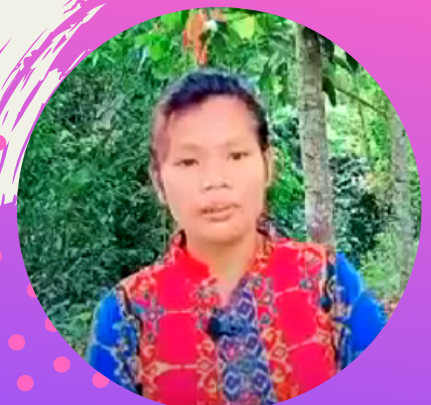
Eventually, we got used to Poblacion. When I reached elementary, I remembered that during election season, my family and my neighbors would pack because of the chaos that ensued in our community. During election days, we were always alert and ready for anything that could happen because killings, ambushes, and shootings were rampant in our community. One of the many reasons for this was because of the moro that did not have the spirit of sportsmanship and trouble would ensue because of their loss. In the midst of these challenges, I continued my studies until I finished high school.

When I started college, I witnessed the hardships that my parents went through in financing and supporting our studies. This is because three of us went to college consecutively. Our eldest is in their third year of college, while the second is in their sophomore year. Meanwhile, I was in my first year of college. In the midst of hardship, it never occurred to me to stop studying because this is why I looked for and applied for scholarship programs offered by a Governor.

I qualified under this program. However, this was not enough because the program only covered tuition fees. I needed additional financial aid for my other expenses. This is when I started looking for opportunities and made the decision to become a working student. During this time, I worked while doing my studies. This is when I experienced the hardships of being a working student. Because of my service, I answered three families under one roof. This is why I found it hard to concentrate on the teacher when I was inside the classroom because I was thinking of my duties at home.

Not long after, I was forced to leave my service and temporarily stop my studies. I went to different places to look for another job. I spent over 2 years in Davao City working as a cashier at a big mall. I also became a sales clerk and lived there alone. I drew strength from my friends at church who sympathized with me for two years.

When the pandemic happened, they became strict in Davao because of the rise of cases of COVID-19. At this point, I chose to go back to our province. When I came back home, I saw the situation of my community and I was deeply saddened by the conflict that was brought by the outsiders who forcibly tried to possess the lands of our tribe. I learned that many of our fellow tribe members were at an evacuation center. We did not have any power because the opposition had weapons. We were forced to stay in the evacuation center because what fight did we have against weapons? Because of this, I went back to study in the city of Cotabato. I also joined different seminars where my mind was opened. My awareness of what was happening in our community also heightened, and I became an active youth member of our tribe.



Creative Output

A VIDEO ESSAY BY FEBY MIDAL

The artist chose poetry and mixed media to produce her video essay that aims to put a spotlight to the story of her mother, Linda Midal, a Lambangian indigenous woman human rights defender. By using poetry, photos, and videos as a medium to tell a story, the artist highlighted the story of her mother as a witness and victim of violence, displacement, and inequality at a young age. Using her mother's perspective as the driving point of the narrative, the artist juxtaposed her own story and experiences to emphasize that indigenous young woman like her continues to experience these challenges. She gave importance to how they continue to work within and outside their community to inform fellow Lambangians that indigenous peoples have rights and must be protected and promoted.

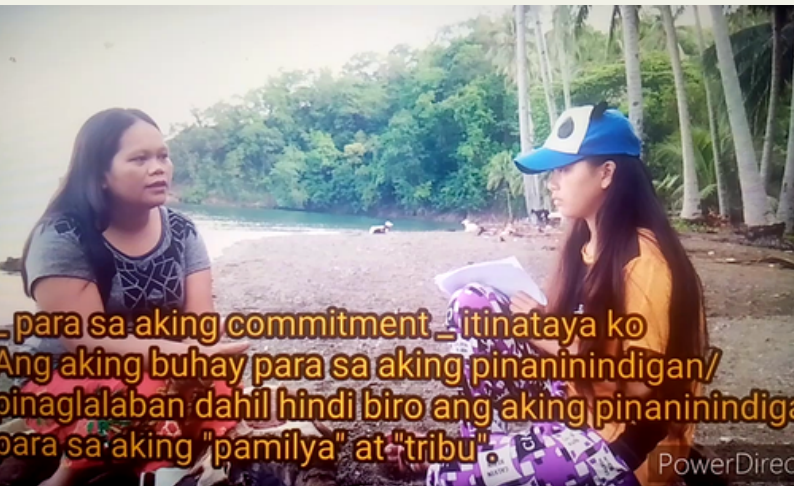
Feby Midal is a Lambangian young indigenous woman based in Maguindanao. She is an active member of the Teduray and Lambangian Manganguda Bangkeson (TLMABANG) Youth.



To watch the video essay: [CLICK HERE](#).

MY BIOGRAPHY

THE STORY OF JENNEVIE PAGUILIDAN CORNELIO



I am Fintalian Jennevie P. Cornelio from Looy, South Upi, Maguindanao, and I am an indigenous person from the Teduray tribe. I am currently living in Awang Dos.

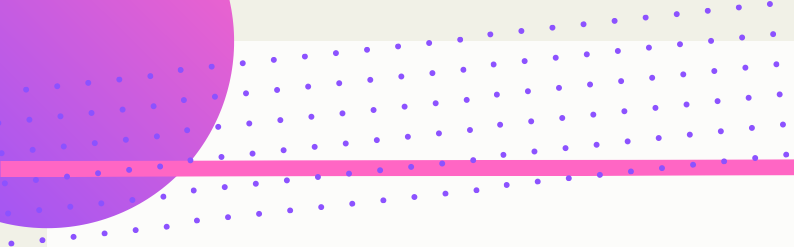
As a Fintalian, I went through many things in life before I reached my aspirations as an individual and in my duties as part of the tribe. I needed to strengthen my resolve to fulfill these

duties, especially in organizing. When I traveled to different places, I learned about so many problems and processes in the community, especially in the discussion of families. It was hard to organize without money. Back then, we needed to look for food so that we could feed the communities we went to or the places we stayed at in our studies regarding the importance of our rights, and whatever it meant the future that we aspired for the tribe was. We also offered and informed people of why it is necessary to strengthen and unify the tribes of Teduray and Lambangian. Although we were able to expand the knowledge of our fellow Teduray and Lambangian, there were times as well when people did not believe in what we were saying. Sometimes, those who believed us did not find it easy as well to simply forget what they had learned before. As an organizer, I did not give notice to these things because I knew that one day they would think about this and tell themselves that "what they told us before was right". And they will realize the importance of these things, especially in discussions about tribes.

When I was starting out as an indigenous woman youth and I joined the elders in organizing my fellow women and youth, we spent hours walking to different places until nightfall.



We did not have any car to ride as transportation because the roads were dangerous and there were few roads to begin with. If there was any vehicle, there would be boats but I was afraid to ride one back then. Thus we were forced to go for and go through the forests and mountains. Sometimes we would start our journey at six in the early morning to walk so that we could reach where we needed to be by nighttime. Sometimes we would arrive at our destination in the early morning because of the long and difficult routes we needed to pass. My feet became wounded and swollen but this did not stop us from fulfilling our duties. There were times when I would almost befall an accident because of the rocky roads. We would lurk the grasslands and jump down so that we could get to the place we needed to be faster. There was also a time when we almost died because we got lost along the way. We had accidentally wandered into the parts of the forest which were covered by armed troops and they wanted to kill us because they thought we were bad people. We begged for them to release us because we simply got lost and we asked them for help to point us in the right direction. By the mercy of God, we were set free and they believed in us.



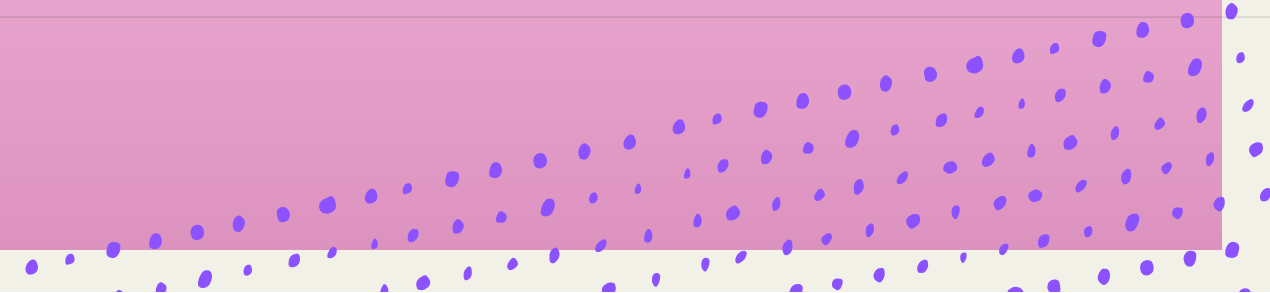
My experience and my decision to join this cause are no joke. There were some who belittled my abilities as a woman. They said things like why I believe in the capabilities of a woman, and they questioned the skills that I could employ within the processes of the tribe. I was also told back then that I was simply a young woman that was immersing myself in the discussions of the tribe and all I could do was talk and not act. I used these experiences to become more steadfast and prove to them that I can do this. Even though in their view, I was just a weak woman, this led me to understand myself and what I am capable of.

I have reached who I am now because of my experiences. I am married and we have been blessed with five children who have become an additional source of inspiration in my life. I have continued what I have started before and one of my advocacies has been to promote the rights of women, especially the rights of the youth. I have seen the importance of featuring the voices of the youth because this is when I started all my activities in the first place. I honed my attention towards pushing for the rights of women and promoting discussions as well on our rights to lands, rights to their individual preferences of life, and rights to move freely.

From the beginning and until now, I have sealed into my heart and mind that in my acceptance and decision of these responsibilities, I will not yield or stop because I do not have anything to pass on to my children, family, or people who have been part of this fight, except for the knowledge that I have used as a sword in the hardships of life, and that they learn and become aware of the rights of every tribe. This is so that they cannot be belittled or fooled by anyone, and so that they may also share this with the next generations.

My commitment is that I will not give up until my last chapter or even if this is in exchange for my own life. I vow to further strengthen my resolve to forward my advocacy for my tribe.

To the youth, I hope we do not use our knowledge for the wrong purposes. Let us use this to help our futures. Let us not be content with mere studies, or just the fact of passing because you have reached these milestones because of the affirmations, beliefs, and sacrifices of your parents, and the tribe.



May this serve as a means to strengthen and help other fellow tribes to continue the advocacy that was started by our ancestors. May you serve as an example for the next generation and carriers of the history and values of the tribe, as well as become challengers to your fellow youth, to encourage them to study hard in good ways. You will also be continuing the fight that was started in our assertion of rights and the building of our unified community.

To mothers, you will serve as guides to your children in teaching them about the knowledge that we got from our ancestors, and the rights enshrined in discussions about the tribe. The time will come when I can no longer walk long distances, and I will reach my old age.

However, I will always be here for you to ask questions and to share my wisdom on discussions about the rights of the tribe. As a Fintailan, it is my honor to share the experiences I faced in the activities of our tribe. Let us band together to face whatever hurdles come along in our aspirations for tomorrow.



FIYO BAGI MEUYAG.

Fight for what your rights are and do not be frightened by whatever challenge comes your way. Even though you are a woman or youth, this is not a hurdle or fault of anyone in the achievement of the future that you want for yourself.

**JENNEVIE
CORNELIO**

Jennevie Cornelio is an indigenous woman Teduray from South Upi, Maguindanao. She served as Secretary General of Inged Fintailan, an organization of women Teduray-Lambangian who advance the rights of indigenous women. She is also an indigenous leader who actively organizes, guides, and inspires many youth tribes in Maguindanao.

THE INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER I ADMIRE

A REFLECTION BY RIZA MAE P. CAMPO



I am Riza Mae P. Campo, from Nuro Upi, Maguindanao. I am sixteen years old and currently in my fourth year of high school at Sabaken National High School. I like to play the guitar and create different illustrations. Aside from this, I also like to play basketball because this is one of the games that I grew up

playing. Even before, I always listened to the stories of my parents about their experiences in life and the different forms of discrimination that our tribe has gone through, especially regarding discussions about land. Personally, it was an honor to be chosen to converse with Fintalian Jennevie P. Cornelio—a leader of our tribe whom I only grew up hearing about from my mother's stories.

The life experiences she told me about are no joke. I felt a deep sadness because of what she went through as a youth indigenous leader. Her life was at stake because of what she fought for. However, my sadness was replaced by joy and pride because I knew that in the middle of the challenge she faced, the danger was not a hurdle for her to continue her activities and advocacies for the tribe.

My mother was also active in these community activities for women. She also accompanied Finta Jen in Manila. She also shared with me how important what she was doing was, and what the reason is for her joining the advocacies promoted by Finta Jen for our family and tribe.

Despite the hardships and scarcity of resources in life, this wasn't a hurdle for me and my siblings to finish our studies. I saw how hard my parents had worked to continue supporting us for our future. Because of their efforts, my two elder siblings were able to finish their studies. However, when I was in my second year of high school at fourteen years old, there came an unexpected trial in my family. I was wrapped in fear, weakness, and grief along with my family.

On December 25, 2019, my mother passed. Because of her death, I lost my drive to study. I lost my honor standing. I also thought about taking my own life. In those moments, it seemed that I did not care about what happened in the world around me because of how listless I felt without my mother. But with the help of God, I slowly got myself back up with my family. I used the advice, dreams, and memories of my mother as a stepping stone to start again. It was hard at first but I was able to overcome this because of the dreams we made together back then.

Last March 2020, my studies suddenly halted because of the pandemic. We called COVID-19 "dulet" in our Teduray community. Because of the sickness that spread around, movement around the country was affected. Life changed significantly because we could not go out and go anywhere. We needed to stay at home. Many people lost their jobs and sources of livelihood. The fear and anxiety people felt did not cease because of everyone's situation. COVID-19 had such large effects, especially on our livelihoods and the economy of the country. We felt even more hardship in life. Oftentimes, we were short on money to buy rice. Sometimes in a week, we would just eat cassava or banana instead of rice. Even our studies were affected because we were no longer allowed to go to school. Modular learning was implemented when my father had to get out modules from the school and we would need to answer these at home in the span of a week. Because of this style of learning, I became depressed. I thought about how I wasn't the only one who was finding difficulty in this system, but also my other fellow students and especially indigenous people. I also heard about other students who took their own lives because of the depression that the new system our country had followed brought forth.



In 2020, I first got the opportunity to join the initiatives of Kabataang Kababaihan ng mga Kababihan ng mga Katutubo o KKPinay which were held in Awang D.O.S Maguindanao II. I was not used to being part of activities then and because of COVID-19, these were held online on Zoom. Since then, I always joined the activities so that I could learn more about what I could do for my tribe. I was lacking in knowledge then, and these were things I only heard about from the stories of my mother. Now, I finally understand all the stories she told me about. I am happy to be part of the organization Inged which is spearheaded by Fintalan Jennevie Cornelio. This became a bridge for me to join other activities and hone my other skills. With each activity that I joined, I left my module so that Ate Rizell could also attend and come, as an indigenous youth woman leader herself.

While I interviewed Ate Jen, I was filled with a mixture of happiness and sadness in my heart because of my admiration for the bravery and strength she has shown as an indigenous woman. I admired her even more for her stories and I held onto her advice for youth like me. Now, in the path I chose to live, I choose to continue to stand because I have come across many inspirations. I desire to hone my knowledge and help my tribe, especially my fellow youth. I am happy to learn and help as well with the next generation so that I can share my learnings, and stand for what is good, and our rights.

FIYO BAGI MEUYAG!



Creative Output



THE INDIGENOUS WOMAN I ADMIRE BY RIZA MAE PAGUILIDAN CAMPO

According to the artist, her artwork draws inspiration from Jennevie Cornelio, a Teduray indigenous woman human rights defender. The artist said that Cornelio's experiences as an indigenous woman leader and her persistence and courage to continue with her advocacy despite multiple challenges are what she admires the most.

Through this work, the artist aims to share both Cornelio's story and her story as an emerging young indigenous woman leader.

Riza Mae is a Teduray indigenous young woman from South Upi, Maguindanao.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

THE STORY OF TUWALI INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER MYRNA DUYAN

MYRNA DUYAN

My name is **Myrna Duyan**. I am an indigenous woman and a farmer. My parents were farmers too. Since I was young, I would help around the house and assist in taking care of my younger siblings. I would even help on the farm just to try to make our lives a little bit easier. It was hard. Even so, I was able to study from elementary to high school. It wasn't easy to do so since I had to switch from one school to another. This was because there were no schools that were actually near us. Despite how difficult it was, I overcame every obstacle and was able to finish high school. Because I was born a girl, I knew that there would be many hurdles that I would have to overcome. It is thanks to the help of my parents who gave me the support I needed, and God who continues to watch over and guide me that I was able to rise up to these challenges. Still, the life of a farmer is a tough one. I wasn't able to enroll in college because my family needed me, so I continued to do the chores at home and attend to the farm.



Even though I told myself that I would prioritize supporting my family, I could not have expected someone to court me, and even more, so that I would say yes. Because I was not able to finish my education, my husband and I ended up farming as well. This life has sustained us even until now.

My father has always been an active member of the Didipio Earth Savers Movement Association (DESAMA), an organization composed of indigenous peoples in Didipio, Nueva Viscaya. Back then, I couldn't understand what that meant or what he did. Now that I'm the one attending meetings, seminars, and trainings, it's all starting to make sense. I first met Jenal Javier from Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM). He answered all my questions and explained so much to me. I continued to remain active and participate in the training and meetings organized by ATM - whether they be at a barangay, provincial, national, or international level, I make sure to go and help with the initial research needed as well as venue preparations. Sometimes, DESAMA even visits us and attends our meetings too. It was in 2019 that ATM introduced me to LILAK Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights. They invited me to a meeting in Manila. I was too shy to accept the invitation and said I couldn't attend since I was not able to complete my education. Later, Sir Emer of ATM convinced me to go by saying, "Try mo lang, marami kang matutunan doon. (Just give it a shot, you'll learn a lot there.)" So, I went to Manila and my first meeting lit a match under me. It was in 2019 that OceanaGold Philippines' (OGPI) contract expired. Local organizations such as the Samahang Pangkarapatan ng Katutubong Magsasaka at Manggagawa Inc. (SAPAKMMI) and DESAMA coordinated with one another in order to oversee the creation of a barricade that would be placed in our area. We watched over the site and I began to notice that more and more women were coming to the checkpoint. I talked to them and asked if they had any suggestions regarding our situation. They said that even if they struggle with the work if this will stop OGPI then they will help. I gained the strength to lead the women who joined the barricade at the checkpoint.

¹ OceanaGold Philippines Incorporated started mining in Didipio way back in 2006 under the OceanaGold Corporation of Australia. Since then many violations against human rights occurred such as the destruction of homes and forcible evacuation from 2008-2009. Despite the expiration of the Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) agreement between them and the Philippine government in 2019, OGPI continued their operations stating that they were legally allowed to do so while awaiting contract renewal.

Source: https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Mining-Away-Freedoms-_-pages_compressed_compressed.pdf

The time came when we had to step up and stand firm in the face of oppression. On April 6, 2020, the barricade was forcibly demolished in a joint operation by the security forces of OGPI with the local police headed by the Kasibu Police. Many were hurt and traumatized by the brutality of the police, compounded with the experience of living in the height of a pandemic. As if that wasn't enough, they filed charges against 15 people - many of whom are indigenous women². 'Till this day, I continue to help my comrades who were served lawsuits and carry on with the fight to protect our human rights.



² The Tawali women were among the 30 environmental activists who were forcibly removed from the peoples' barricade. It was constructed in order to bar the entry of fuel tankers from continuing their operations at Didipio mine. Unfortunately, the contract between OGPI and the Philippine government was eventually renewed in 2021 which will allow them to mine for the next 25 years.

Sources:

https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Mining-Away-Freedom_-_pages_compressed_compressed.pdf

<https://www.lilak.net/blog/oceanagold-mining-permit-renewal-spells-25-more-years-of-violence-and?categoryid=301466>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Myrna Duyan is a Tawali indigenous woman from Didipio, Nueva Viscaya. She currently leads Bileg Dagiti Babbae (Power of Women), an anti-mining organization of Tawali women in Didipio.

THE STORY OF TUWALI INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER MYRNA PULIDO DUYAN

A REFLECTION BY CHERRY ANN DULNUAN

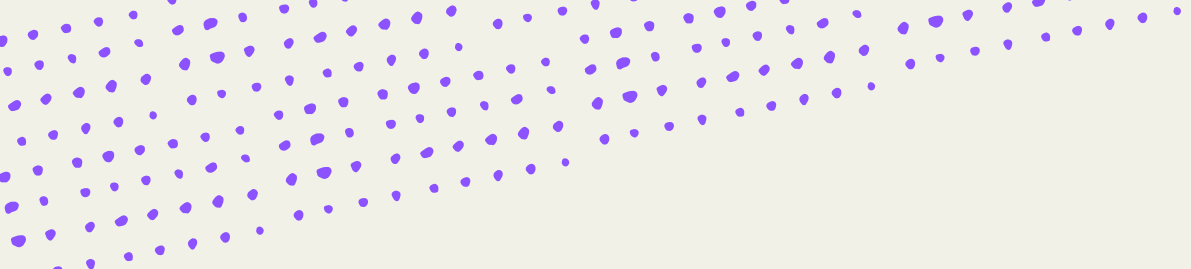


My name is **Cherry Ann Dulnuan**. I was born on November 01, 1999, at Barangay Dalligan, Kiangan, Ifugao. Currently, I live in Didipio, Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.

While I was exchanging stories with Auntie Myrna, I learned how hard life was for the people back in her time. But they find joy in the simple things in life.

The people in the community would understand and help each other. They lived off of farming and harvested rice, fruits, and vegetables.

When I was a child, I already experienced first-hand how hard life was. Farming vegetables was our way of life. My parents would always tell us that we had to learn how to work because they can't live forever and won't be around to take care of us then, so sometimes I would help out on the farm. My parents struggled to make ends meet. I've experienced going to school with only rice as my lunch, with salt alone to flavor the rice on good days, and boiled sweet potato to eat as a snack. Sometimes I would even have to be the one to mill my own rice so that we have something to eat in the morning, and then do it again in the afternoon when I come home from school. Aside from milling rice, I also do other chores around the house. Since I am the oldest child in my family, I have to take care of my younger siblings so that my parents can go work in the fields. As a child, I saw how hard my parents worked - especially my mom, who seemed like a wonder woman with the sheer weight of the load she shouldered as she gardened and did housework on top of farming. That's



why as a daughter, I do my best to help. It's through doing the work my mom does that I've experienced how hard it is to be a mother. When I help take care of my siblings, sometimes I picture how I would be as a mother in the future. This is how I know my mom truly is a hero.

In 2012, I graduated from Dalligan Elementary School. It was during this same year that we came to Didipio, Nueva Vizcaya. When we first got to Didipio, there weren't many houses in sight and the roads were only beginning to be cemented in. As we continued to live here I slowly started seeing the changes in my community. More and more people were coming to live here and the construction of houses and roads were steadily underway. I ended up finishing my high school and senior high school education here as well. It was then that I really strived to do well, despite life's challenges, so I can have a better future.

When I was in Grade 12, I was invited by one of my friends to take part in some activity their organization was hosting. This organization was Didipio Earth Savers Movement Association (DESAMA), an anti-mining organization based in our community. At first I couldn't understand what the point of the organization was, but over time I began to realize why taking part in it is important.

I became an active member of DESEMA in 2021 and took part in a women-led organization, Bileg Dagiti Babbae (Power of Women). As a young woman, there is so much more that I want to know and learn which is why I join the activities.

As Auntie Myrna shared her experiences as a female leader, I really felt the pain she and other women went through. Even though I myself have never experienced some of the things that they experienced, I understand that they went through so much especially when the mining company came to our community. This is why we are ready to continue the fight our leaders have started. We know that their fight for our community is for us, and for future generations to come.



Creative Output

THE STRENGTH OF WOMEN

A POEM BY CHERRY ANN TAYABAN DULNUAN

From the opening of our eyes
We set our eyes on our rich
surroundings
Ample food is enjoyed
And the reassurance of every
indigenous mother

The environment which provides
certainty
Resources that cannot be matched
Surroundings of charm and peace
Playgrounds of children who grow to
be strong and healthy

The blessings of the environment
Which bring us relief
The chirping sound of birds
And clean water and air that we can
savor

In the quick changing of seasons
Natural resources have been destroyed
and poisoned
Deluge, mud, and grave disasters
The effect of harmful mining

Because the environment is what gives
life
Indigenous women will fight
Harmful mining and foreign invaders
will be hindered
Until our culture and rights are
recognized

We are ready to move
Each leader and member of
organizations
We will join rallies, secure check points,
and encourage our fellow indigenous
people
Because we will not agree to abuse

All the elderly and young women, let us
continue to take a stand
Let us take care of our singular Mother
Earth
Protect our cultures, defend our rights
Our strength lies in the unity and
strength of each and every woman!



THE STORY OF A BRAVE INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER

A REFLECTION BY JOAN SICOAN



When Ate¹ Myrna was sharing stories about her life, Cherry Ann Dulnuan and I listened intently. The conversation became very personal. She started sharing about her struggles as a mother and the responsibilities she shouldered that came with the role. Thanks to her and her husband's teamwork, they were able to tackle all of their problems together. But then, foreigners² came and

created more problems. The foreigners wanted to destroy our lands in order to conduct a mass mining operation. This will not only harm the environment, but also affect the land we till and rely on to live.

My name is **Joan Sicoan**. I am 33 years old and I live in Didipio, Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.

Even when I was just a child, I already somewhat understood how hard our life was, since our main source of livelihood was farming. Back then the roads were not yet paved nor cemented so my parents had a hard time selling our produce. Still, we never went hungry because of my parents' hard work and dedication. As the eldest child of my family, I am expected to help with household chores and to take care of my younger siblings when we don't have school. High school was a hard period of my life because of the long walk I had to take to get to the place where my school was located. Just like how Ate Myrna said, I too had to make and pack my own food to eat at school until I finished my secondary education. I wasn't able to go to college because my dad passed away and it became harder for my mom to sustain

¹ The literal translation of "ate" from Filipino to English is "elder sister." It is used colloquially as a term of respect used when addressing women who are older than the speaker.

² In 1994, the ClimaxArimco Mining Corporation signed a Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) which marked the beginning of the Didipio Gold-Copper Project. The project was eventually handed over to OceanaGold Corporation, a mining company from Australia, who then set up a local subsidiary called OceanaGold Philippines Incorporated (OGPI) which now oversees operations in Didipio mine. Source: https://forum-asia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Mining-Away-Freedom-_-pages_compressed_compressed.pdf



all of us. This is why after some time I decided to get married since I won't be able to study anymore anyway.

I married my husband in 2006. It wasn't until I gave birth to my eldest child and became a mother that I felt and experienced first-hand what Ate Myrna went through. Just like Ate Myrna's husband, mine was kind too, and we were able to overcome many hardships until our children grew older. All this time, together with our parents, we continued to struggle against the company that came to our land. I eventually joined activities hosted by the solidarity groups and organizations, and even helped with their documentation. This continued even as the situation got worse due to the abuses of the mining company. In fact, I was the one who documented through videos the violations made by the OceanaGold Philippines as they violently dispersed and destroyed our peaceful barricade last April 2020 at the height of the pandemic.

I was able to connect to the stories that Ate Myrna shared about her life since I had also experienced them even as a child. Our only difference is that I lost my father early in my life. The company that came just added to our problems. Even after my father's death, my mother also involved herself and openly opposed the operations of OceanaGold. The stories Ate Myrna shared gave me the strength to face all the problems that came my way and inspired me to be as good of a mother as she was. Her wisdom also helped steel our organization, especially because the situation now is more dire since the company was able to renew its contract to continue mining operations.

Even so, as an indigenous woman I am able to stand firm on my principles. With the help of my colleagues in the organization, other allied organizations such as LILAK, ATM, and Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC), and many others who continue to support us, we gain the courage to continue the fight that our elders such as Ate Myrna Duyan have started in order to protect our lands.

It is my dream that justice will be served in the name of all the violations that the company has committed, and that they will be stopped before the next generation comes.



Creative Output

BRAVERY OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN

A POEM BY JOAN SICOAN

In our ancestral lands, life is quiet,
happy, and harmonious
Natural resources are abundant which
overflow with blessings
As long as you are diligent and in the
togetherness of work
From the harvests of farming, there will
be no hunger or poverty

But companies of greed arrived
And exuberance slowly faded
Because of mining, the environment is
depleted
Because of dams built, the rivers have
run dry
There is nothing left from the heritage
of our ancestors

We cannot turn our backs on the
destruction of the environment
Thus us mothers have left our homes
We are prepared to sacrifice even when
our friends and chores are left
And we will face the fear of the streets
like the severe dispersion of police

Back then women have shown their
courage
Now we unite and call you to fight for
rights

Listen to the desires of the majority
and save the environment
So that the world may not fully be
destroyed by foreigners and peace
Which is yearned for is achieved

Our dreams are simple
Rich surroundings and a safe
community for our children who will
inherit
That in any attempt to seize and steal
by the greedy ones
That the bravery of indigenous women
in this fight is immeasurable



THE STORY OF BAE MERCY WABE

BAE MERCY WABE



My name is Bae Mercy Wabe, Bae Kalalagan. I am 55 years old, born on January 12, 1967 in Bayanga, Cagayan de Oro City. I am an Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) in Barangay Bayanga, and I am also a representative of the Kahiusahan sa Ancestral Domain Women's Organization (KADHWO), now known as Panika Ha Pusaka.

I have been an IPMR since 2019. I was also able to organize a women's group in our barangay. I am glad that this interview happened, because I have been given a chance to share all the emotions that I've been carrying in my heart.

"I want to strengthen our group of Higaonon women..."

One reason I encouraged and challenged myself to become a leader was that our datu's leadership was lacking. I want to strengthen our group of Higaonon women, because our datu has no plans for us. I am always the one shouldering his work. Despite this, I am thankful for my colleagues who are still here with me.

The idea of forming and leading a women's group came to me since they already thought of me as a leader. I am grateful for their support in my advocacy for our women's group. I also thank the officials and my colleagues for supporting me as a woman leader doing the right thing for the good of all.

As an IPMR, I have experienced challenges from the very beginning. I have gone one term without any pay because they refused to recognize me as a colleague. Despite this, I accomplished my work in order to give a voice to my fellow IPs so that our grievances may be heard. This is why I dealt with being unpaid, because one of my oaths was to serve the Higaonon tribe.

This is the most difficult thing I have experienced as an IPMR.

I struggled financially because I went a year without being paid. Thankfully, I have many generous grandchildren. It was very difficult not having any help from our datu. He did not even contribute anything good to our group. He relied on me for everything, even if it was meant to be his responsibility. He simply left us on our own, and he did not support us as a datu.

I am grateful for my family and the Higaonon tribe for their help, and for never abandoning me. No matter what happens, they have always been there. Whether through hardships or victory, they have always supported me. Some of the other officials have also wholeheartedly supported my leadership.

Through difficult times, my family is the one I go to first, because they understand me. They tell me to finish what I started, because what would happen without an IP representative leading our group?

At times when I've wanted to rest, I go to our mountain to recharge with my family.

"I have taught them that activism is not just for women, but for the youth as well, because they will continue our tradition and culture."

What is important to me is that I have done everything to achieve my hopes for women, and so my fellow indigenous women can use this as inspiration. I have taught them that activism is not just for women, but for the youth as well, because they will continue our tradition and culture.

I fear that one day the indigenous people of Barangay Bayanga will disappear. So I will commit to my work, because what would happen to the youth otherwise? There are still projects to be implemented, and I know how to run an organization. I told them to continue what I started.

Most importantly, our barangay now knows the Higaonon people.

MERCY WABE

Mercy Wabe is a Higaonon woman leader based in Brgy. Bayanga, Cagayan de Oro. She serves as an IPMR and an active member of the Panika Ha Pusaka, an organization of Higaonon indigenous women in Cagayan de Oro.



STRENGTH AND COURAGE

BABAE KA, HINDI BABAE LANG

A REFLECTION BY ELLEN NACALABAN



I am Ellen Nacalaban, an indigenous woman leader from Sitio Midkiwan, Barangay Bayanga, in the city of Cagayan de Oro.

I am part of the Bayanga Higaonon Women's Organization, an organization made up of indigenous women that originated in Barangay Bayanga.

This organization was founded in 2016, and I became an active secretary in our organization. In my journey, this is where I became aware of everything that must be done to advance the rights of indigenous people, especially indigenous women and children.

In becoming active in the organization, I came to know Bae Kalalagan Mercy Wabe deeply. She is a daughter, a mother, a grandmother, a friend, and a woman leader in the community. She is the president of our group in Bayanga Higaonon Women's Organization. She was also an Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) in our area. She is hardworking, understanding, helpful to others, and loving towards her family. She is a woman ready to fight for our welfare, especially when we are being oppressed.

She faces many challenges in her life because she is a leader.. As an IPMR, one such challenge is that she is not recognized as the Higanon representative because she has not been part of the workforce for about 3 years..

After one term, she served again as the IPMR in our barangay. Just like her first experience, she served in the position for a long time, however some members of the Barangay Council refused to sign her papers. The Barangay Council insisted that it was because she had no expenses during the elections.

However, this did not stop her from joining workshops and gatherings with fellow IPs that showcased the strength and voices of IP women, especially in terms of knowing our rights and protecting our ancestral land.

Bae Mercy is a strong woman. In our group, she is the one who plans and conceptualizes all of our projects. She also leads the activities in our community. She gives financial support and other assistance so we can continue our projects, even when she is struggling.

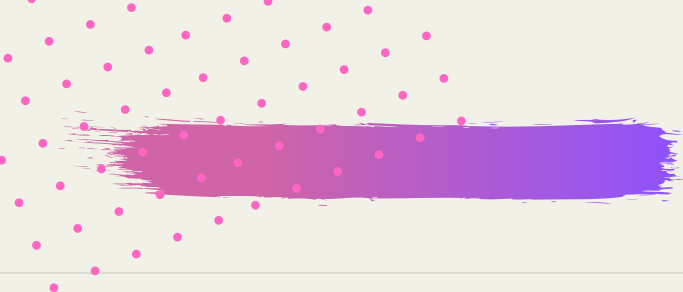
One experience with Bae Mercy that I will never forget is when we stopped an attempt to steal our ancestral land back in August of 2020. Those forces were led by Datu Dagdagan, from the Royal Blood group—an organization which the NCIP did not recognize.

They came as a big group to Sitio Midkiwan, where we lived. When they arrived from Barangay Mambuaya, they were accompanied by a former barangay chairperson from their barangay.

They are known for their cruel actions towards the community, such as selling our lands and settling in privately owned areas which have malicious intentions towards Sitio Midkiwan Bayanga.

They are prepared to attack Midwikan and steal our land, but we are not blind or deaf to what is happening. We stood up and fought for our rights, especially when it comes to the protection of our ancestral lands.

We did not let them into our area. We IP women, led by Bae Mercy, formed a barricade to bar Datu Dagdagan and his group from entering. With the help of our Barangay Captain, Felipe Baang, their attempt to invade our land was stopped and they eventually fled in the end. We women stayed at the barricade to ensure that they would never be able to step onto our ancestral land.



For me, Bae Mercy is a role model. She taught me how to become a real tribe member. Our culture is being preserved—from dances, to behaviors, to songs, and much more—for the future generations. She also became my inspiration to become active in asserting and protecting human rights.

I have a question for myself: would I be able to do what Bae Mercy does?

These questions to myself are what pushed me to be resilient against challenges in life.

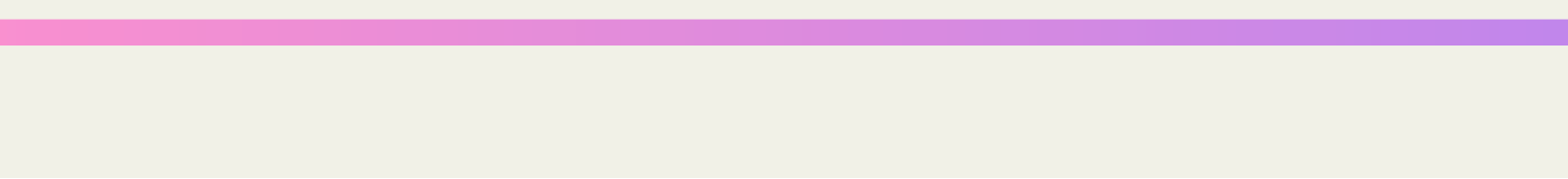
How many years have we been dreaming of our title to our ancestral land, yet where is it now? So much sweat and tears have been shed, and many sacrifices have been made! Yet until now, there have been no effective or valid solutions to our concerns.



How much longer must we wait?

We will not be here forever, and we want to witness the victory we have been hoping for. Because of this, I will be sure to continue my work for all the IPs that wish and fight for a better future.

As a daughter and a mother, I will put my heart into everything I do for the community.



I will ensure that I lead a life of resilience and courage as a woman and as a Higaonon woman, for a brighter future for my family, for women, and for the youth.

We will continue what we started and use the experiences and teachings of women leaders like Bae Mercy and many more.

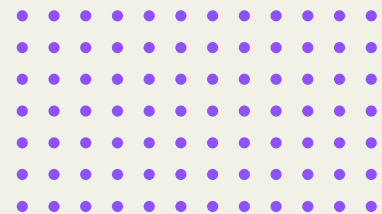
We are women, NOT "just" women. Let us fight for the future and continue what we started. We are continuously striving towards the victory that is coming, that we have been waiting for since the beginning.

Babae, tayo ay hindi babae lang.

Fight!



Creative Output



A VIDEO ESSAY BY BAE ELLEN NACALABAN

Ellen Nacalaban used her reflection as a starting point for her creative output. She decided to make a video essay reflecting the learnings she gained from Bae Mercy. The video essay was a collective output of Bae Ellen, together with Michelle Dagsaan and Christine Jane Masandaan, with guidance from Bae Rose and Bae Mercy.

The video features the story of Higaonon woman in the midst of challenges and obstacles in fighting for their rights as indigenous peoples, their right for ancestral lands, and human rights.



To watch the video essay: [CLICK HERE.](#)

MY DREAM FOR THE HIGAONON YOUTH

THE STORY OF HIGAONON INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER ROGELIA LANDONG



I am **Rogelia, "Bae Kaangayan" Amarga Landong**, born on January 3, 1966 in the city of Naawan, Misamis Oriental. I am a tribal leader and Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of Barangay Tumpagon chosen by our Ininay, Inamay¹ and the council of the Higaonon Tribe. I am also a representative of the indigenous women organization known as Panika Ha Pusaka,

previously known as the Kahiusahan sa Ancestral Domain Women's Organization, and a leader of Ganda Farming Association.

My inspiration as an IP woman leader were my parents. My father, Datu Sundalan, was a baylan² and datu³ of our ancestral land. As a child, I witnessed how my father gave importance to our tribe's culture and tradition. This is the reason why I am continuing what he started.

As an IPMR, I accomplish duties such as creating resolutions in relation to the livelihood programs for my fellow IPs and raising tribal issues and problems to the barangay council. I am able to say that I have done good things because I have already reached my second term in my position. I consider myself a leader because if someone needs help, they approach me. For me, this is just one sign that they know me as an IP woman leader.

Alongside the challenges that have arisen, I have not been shaken and I have continued my service to my fellow IPs. I am thankful for my children because I am able to lean on them whenever I feel discouraged. They have become my strength and, most importantly, I ask for guidance and prayers from Magbabaya⁴ I pray that

1 The elders of the tribe.

2 A spiritual leader able to communicate with the gods and drive away evil spirits.

3 The chief of the tribe.

4 The highest and most powerful deity of the Higaonon.

He may give me strength and a healthy body along with my family, who have become my inspiration for me to accomplish my duties as a leader. Because I am afraid that the day will come when we no longer have any IP youth to continue what we started.

It is my dream for us to build a talugan or "tribal hall" where we can host our tribal meetings. And hopefully we will be given a literacy center, a Higaonon Tribe school where the IP youth will be taught with our culture and tradition.

I aspire that the IP youth observe and take part in the tribal activities so that they may learn the importance of Higaonon culture and tradition. And, they will not be lost and pass it onto the next generations.



ROGELIA LANDONG

Bae Rogelia Landong is a Higaonon woman leader from Brgy. Tumpagon, Cagayan de Oro. She serves as IPMR and an active member of Panika Ha Pusaka, an organization of Higaonon women in Cagayan de Oro.

MY DREAM FOR THE HIGAONON YOUTH

THE STORY OF HIGAONON INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER ROGELIA LANDONG

A REFLECTION BY CHRISTINE JANE MASANDAAN



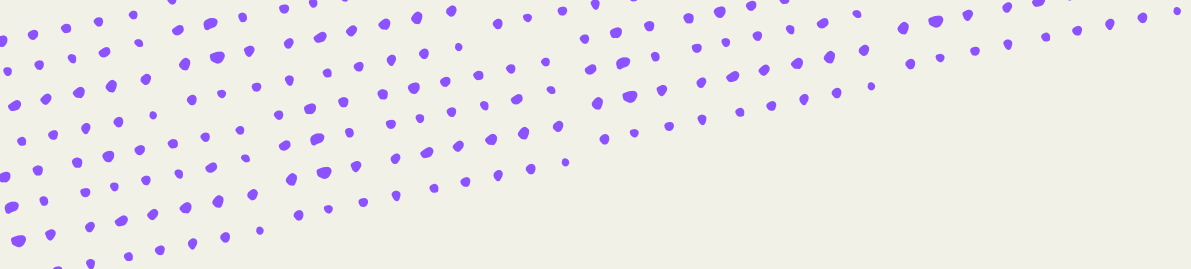
our ancestral land.

As Bae Kaangayan was telling her story, I suddenly froze when she said "I am afraid that the day will come when we are no longer here. Who will continue our tribal practices and teach them to the next generations?". I realized that our culture is now endangered, that no one is dedicating their time to learning the traditions and there are lesser IP youth protecting

I am **Christine Jane S. Masandaan**, born on July 9, 1998 in the province of Bukidnon, and I am an IP youth of the Higaonon Tribe in Barangay Tumpagon, Cagayan de Oro City. In a simple place with a simple lifestyle, this is where I met Bae Rogelia Amarga Landong, or more commonly known as "Bae Kaangayan". She is an IP woman leader who serves and helps her fellow IPs. She does not think of anything but the welfare and future of the tribe. She is a mother with a simple dream for her children, and our community.

As a young IP woman, I aspire to continue what Bae Kaangayan started. To preserve the tradition and culture, to protect the ancestral land, and to help our fellow IPs. And, like Bae Kaangayan, to become a courageous and strong woman leader that strives to protect our culture and tradition despite the challenges in life.

I want to fulfill the dream of our tribe to build a talugan or "tribal hall" where we can host meetings, rituals, and other tribal activities. This is an important place for



the tribe because it will not only be a reception area for visitors, but it will also serve as one of the houses for the IPs of the community.

I also wish for a "literacy center" where the youth will be taught about the importance of our culture and tradition as Higaonon, protecting the ancestral land, language, and indigenous characteristics so that what our ancestors have started will not be lost from the minds and hearts of the IP youth. As an IP woman teacher, it is an honor to teach my fellow IPs.



Creative Output

LIFE

A SONG BY CHRISTINE JANE MASANDAAN

You are my dream,
That I have yearned for so long.
I have fought,
For the rights that have been denied.

Chorus:
You are my life.
I feel overjoyed.

You are an overwhelming challenge,
Fear of loss.
That I cannot continue,
Into the next generation.

Youth, you must move,
For the future.
Contribute to the preservation
Of culture, aaaaaah

And for the rights
In the new system of protection
Of our ancestral lands and our
Culture aaahhh

There is still hope
In the teaching of youth
The continuation of culture,
Of the Higaonon tribe.
Ancestral lands,
Passed down to us.

Indigenous values,
Let us not forget.
Do not.

Women who supervise,
Who showcase bravery
I do not know,

Behind her smiles.

I feel overjoyed
When I choose service.
Traditions that are continued
Responsibilities that are appointed.
Trust in what is given,
Received by the heart.

Let us not turn our backs,
Let us not abuse.
Do not.



"A ROSE BLOSSOMS FOR A TRIBE"

THE STORY OF HIGAONON INDIGENOUS WOMAN LEADER NENA "BAE ROSE" UNDAG-LUMANDONG

"I am a woman? I am not just a woman. I continually fight to protect indigenous women and the youth. I continually walk with deliberation to advocate for the rights deserved by indigenous people and the protection of ancestral lands."

- Luther D. Labitad, "A Rose Blossoms for a Tribe"



I am **Nena "Bae Rose" Undag-Lumandong**, from Apos Kahoy Claveria, and I am an indigenous Higaonon from the ancestry of Apo Manlupiagan. My father is a tribal leader and him and my mother are Baylan.

Decades have passed and until now, I am an active volunteer in indigenous communities in the province of Misamis

Oriental and the city of Cagayan de Oro. I became Philippine Commissioner on Women in 2014-2016 and I actively worked in different organizations with the objective of helping women and strengthening their voices, as well as protecting their rights which are so often neglected. Give adequate attention to the claiming of titles of ancestral lands and the protection of sacred lands as well as preserve the value of culture and traditions of societies.

I have also been actively participating in different jobs at agencies in order to continually recognize the deserved rights which can be helpful in all aspects of indigenous life. I have ensured to be steadfast in protecting the laws and the continued preservation of traditions and cultures that are safeguarded and lived out by many for the next generations.

It has not been easy to travel around to assure that sought-after tranquil and fearless life can be achieved, without doubt, and with unrelenting hope. In my experiences, I will not dismiss from my mind the happy, painful, and incessant activism even during the many moments I lost the drive because of the limited actions and the possibility of becoming the culprit of mistakes you were not responsible for. I will not be able to fully comprehend these experiences into words, but I want those who are like me to know, that a woman leader, or the youth who may have a similar goal, to continue on the journey of this straight path, and instill into their minds that everything has its boundaries and nothing is permanent in this world. Until you are still able to fight for what is right, continue that. Do not forget to allot time for your family, because everyone else may leave you but your family never shall.



However, it is with great happiness and joy that my partner in life, my star Datu Balitengteng, has served as my inspiration alongside my only child so that I may remain positive in all my activities for the indigenous community. My husband has served as my teacher in all the discussions and assertions regarding indigenous people, and the protection of ancestral lands. In our activism for a number of decades, we did not have a house that we can consider a home. But, we are overjoyed whenever we provide assistance because a true leader has a heart of gold, which only shines brighter when it can make other people happy.

In the last words of my biography, I want to declare to other leaders that "a true leader can shape new leaders". Let us be happy in our lives and put to heart everything we do for the indigenous community and our fellow countrymen.

***PADAYUN KUY MGA BABAAYON,
PADAYUN KUY MGA SULED!***

**NENA
"BAE ROSE"
LUMANDONG**

Nena Lumandong, also known as Bae Rose, is a Higaonon woman leader. She is currently the Vice Chairperson of LILAK Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights, and a public servant in the City Social Welfare & Development Office (CSWD) IP Head Section of Cagayan de Oro City.

A RISEN SUNFLOWER FOR A TRIBE

SUNFLOWERS SYMBOLIZE HAPPINESS, CHEERFULNESS, JOY,
AND NEW HOPE

A REFLECTION BY MICHELLE MALATE DAGSAAN



I am **Michelle Malate Dagsaan**, 28 years old, single, and residing in Barangay Tumpagon, in the city of Cagayan de Oro. My whole family and I are descendants of Apo Mambahus, a Higaonon tribe member. My family lives a peaceful and quiet lifestyle in our province and helps keep alive the beautiful traditions and culture of the indigenous people.

When I was a child, I began watching my parents and the good things they did for humanity. I prayed to the Poong Maykapal¹ that my life would turn out like theirs. I was raised in a family that was active in politics and I became used to helping others as I grew up.

It was my dream to become an active youth alongside my parents, and I prayed for nothing else but to do good for others. Things changed one day, when my father passed away. My mother alone has been supporting our everyday needs until now. Because of this, I have worked harder to achieve my dream, not just for myself but for my whole family. I studied well, became a scholar, and graduated from my profession without any other wish but to give my mother and my family a good life.

My journey towards the life I've dreamed of has not been easy because there have been many dark roads. But by the goodness of God, I have been put on a path that I did not expect—to become an active woman leader in a community dedicated to my fellow IPs. This is where I became aware of the experiences and violence that

have occurred in various communities, and where I met Bae Rose, who has now become my second mother.

My perspective on life changed when I got to know Bae Rose. My simple dream became huge, and it was no longer just for myself and my family, but for all indigenous people as well.

Every time Bae Rose speaks, I am amazed and I begin to think seriously about whether I would be able to do what she does. I consider Bae Rose to be a true hero, as well as her partner, Datu Balitengteng. Her experience in life has not been easy. The things she has done for others have not come with any monetary reward. Her journey to achieve her goal is no joke. She is a victim of violence, unjust treatment, and the unpleasant actions of people with malicious intent towards IPs or the ancestral land.

I am determined to fulfill my role as a youth leader and as an indigenous person. It is not easy to be a leader. I have been made aware by some people, including my idol Bae Rose, of how to do the right thing when you have no one to go to or tell aside from yourself and your family. I wonder why only a few people want to take action and continue to fight for the rights they deserve, because the decisions and views of the people around us are unjust. I understand that as a leader, you must be understanding, patient, and great at what you do, in order to fight for what is important to you and your people. I will put all my skills and capabilities into practice and continue to use them everyday to become a more effective leader, along with the guidance of the Ininay at Inamay² who have been my guardians in my training and development.

***PADAYUN KUY MGA
BASBASUNON, MAUYAG!***



¹ The elders of the tribe.

Creative Output

MOTHER, MY COMPANION, AND LIGHT

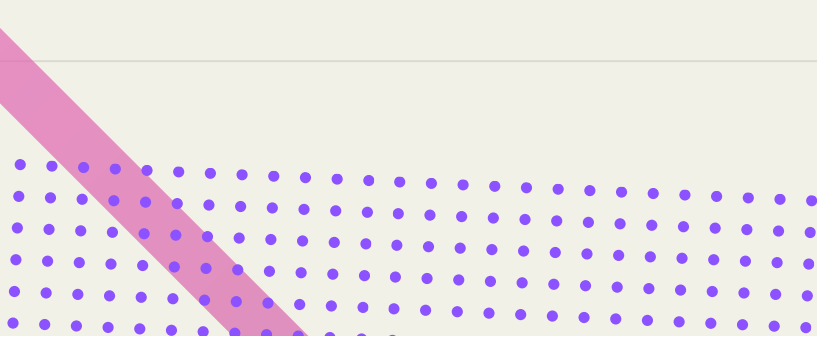
A POEM BY MICHELLE MALATE DAGSAAN

In the dark and broad skies
I set my eyes on the beautiful stars
Stars that twinkle, as dazzling as sparkling diamonds
The stars that I look up to that brighten the night of all
Stars of the night I watch as they pamper the cold air which touches skin

That witnesses faces wet with tears of anguish
Fireflies that bring color to the dark surroundings
Brightness in my eyes that bring joy in the fight for activism
Stars, you awaken my sealed eyes
In the joy and sadness that I feel

Mother, your bravery is extreme
That so many look up to the beauty of your goals
Dreams of light that hopefully become true
Stars that answer prayers of need in the darkness of the night
Oh, my star, you are my hope, you are the light of indigenous people

Mother, you are courage and calm
That each person longs for the joy of companionship
Courage and love for community is the instrument
Of unity in the dream of all indigenous tribes
Mothers and comrades we are the light in a society filled with dreams
Hope for the nation, and individual security is of utmost importance!



Creative Output

REBIRTH OF HOPE, THE DESIRE OF EACH ONE

A POEM BY MICHELLE MALATE DAGSAAN

My heart sings in delight when I feel
hope
My heart cries in sadness,
When I see the sweat and tears of my
fellow women
I am thirsty for a fragment of hope
That serves as life for everyone

How are you?
I know you are tired,
Come here, get some rest!

Our lives are like a rainbow
Different colors, different races bound
by one wish
Oh, hope and recognition for
indigenous people

We endure outcries, travels, weeping,
and aching in our guts
The sacrifice of each one is essential
For the hope that we aspire, where are
you?

In modern times the youth is crucial,
Are you young? Are you a woman?

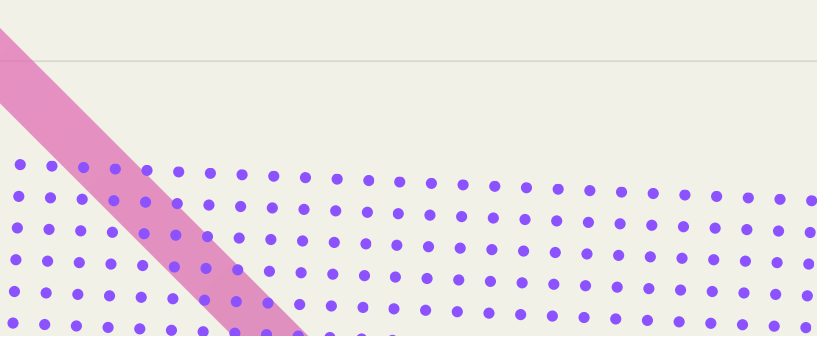
This is not a reason for us to be belittled
or made slaves
Woman, you are a light in the darkness of
the stripping of human rights of the
abused

Because women who have no capacity,
Can part the obstacles along any path to
fight

Respect for women and respect for the
children
My friend, you are a hero to our
motherland

You are valuable and loved by all

You are not alone, I am with you
You are a woman, we are women
Women who are outlined with fragments
of hope





[@katutubonglilak](https://www.instagram.com/katutubonglilak)

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