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FILIPINO FOOD

Project on Cordillera indigenous food, knowledge gets national heritage award

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The book on heirloom recipes provides a glimpse into the typical indigenous meal and its link to the Cordillera communities' rituals and their deep connection with the earth

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The indigenous recipes and traditions of the Cordillera Region took center stage on Friday, November 12, at the National Commission for Culture and the Arts' (NCCA) Philippine Heritage Awards.

The Partners for Indigenous Knowledge Philippines' (PIKP) project "Keeping Alive the Wisdom of Cordillera Indigenous Peoples" was one of the awardees in the Heritage Education and Interpretation category. The organization shared the award with the local government of Tagum and their Kagikan Project.

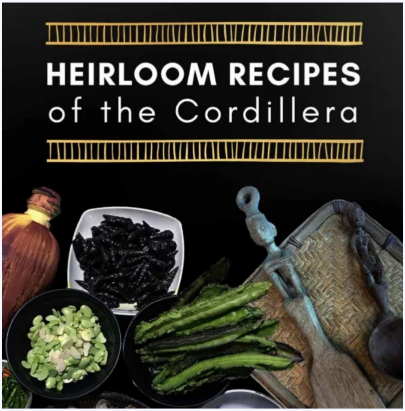
The NCCA praised PIKP's project "for its valuable contributions to preserving local history and culture as well as empowering the community by providing the means to document the intangible heritage of heirloom recipes through a publication."

"The PIKP, in partnership with the Philippine Task Force for Indigenous Peoples Rights (TFIP), responded to the need for relevant and accurate educational material on indigenous peoples to be able to support indigenous elders, women, and youth in the Cordillera to share their knowledge on the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) in the schools," NCCA added.

Documenting indigenous knowledge

In the project, the PIKP and TFIP produced a book documenting indigenous recipes and educational materials for indigenous peoples' education.

TFIP Executive Director Jill Cariño said they compiled 100 indigenous Cordillera recipes in the book, which they titled *Heirloom Recipes of the Cordillera*. They documented the recipes through workshops with knowledge holders from the region's six provinces.



"The food workshops were joyous occasions to learn about local ingredients, age-old ways of preparing food, their values, and meanings, and to share heart-warming meals and stories with the locals," she said.

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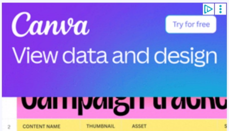
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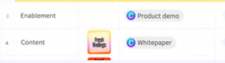

Aside from the heirloom recipes, PIKP and TFIP also partnered with Alejo M. Pacalso Memorial National High School (AMPMNHS) in Bua, Tuding, Itogon, Benguet to compile educational materials for a second book entitled *Daddad-at ëd Itogon.*

The book contains local histories, stories about spirituality and healing, sources of livelihood, food, natural lifestyles, challenges and struggles, values, and lessons. PIKP and TIFP distributed most copies to public elementary and high schools in Baguio City and Benguet through the Department of Education.

GININUB. Roasted salt mixed with coconut oil.

Task Force Indigenous Peoples

Food in rituals, food from nature

The book on heirloom recipes provided a glimpse into the typical indigenous meal and its link to the Cordillera communities' rituals and their deep connection with the earth.

The recipes consisted of locally grown grains, root crops, vegetables, farm animals, river bounties, and occasionally, insects. Most rely on the catch and harvest of the day, making the ingredients fresh and natural.

PINA'TAN NGA AMTA. Beans and mushroom soup in coconut milk

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For instance, *binakle,* a type of rice cake from Ifugao featured in the book, plays a significant part in the Ifugao rice cycle. In the olden days, making the dish was a community affair and part of the post-harvest thanksgiving ritual *Bakle.* Today, cooking *binakle* remains a family bonding activity.

The glutinous rice is pounded, mixed with water and sugar, wrapped in banana leaves, and boiled. It is usually made at night for the following day's breakfast, snacks, and *baon* for the rice fields, school, or long trips. Sometimes, they add a violet sweet potato variety into the mix as a natural food coloring. It's perfect with freshly brewed native coffee.

BINAKLE. Rice and camote cake wrapped in banana leaves.

Task Force Indigenous Peoples

Save the Ifugao Rice Terraces Movement (SITMo) said *Bakle* occurs at the end of the harvest and signals the opening of the fallow period. This is when farmers clear their *payo* (rice terraces) and fertilize it by burying the grass trimmings in the paddies.

Kenelet ay Khachiw, meanwhile, is a dish from Barlig, Mountain Province made from finger-size fish endemic to Cordillera rivers, boiled with rice wine and flavored with salt. In the town of Natonin in Mountain Province, *Kachiw yag Abuos* is a summer delicacy that pairs the fish with abuos (red weaver ant) eggs. The *abuos* build nests and lay their eggs during summer, usually on fruit trees that bear sour fruits.

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Besides the flavors, the book also emphasizes how indigenous peoples in the Cordillera see food. For tribe members, food is a gift from nature to be shared with the family, community, and the unseen spirits that guard the earth. This belief teaches them to get only what they need to make sure that others can share and nothing goes to waste. This belief, too, led them to preserve ingredients that are in abundance for future supply. Preservation methods include drying, smoking, salt curing, and fermenting.

CHINUSNAG. Pounded gabi root with sugarcane juice.

Task Force Indigenous Peoples

The most popular preserved meat in the Cordillera is the *etag.* In the olden days, the *watwat* or chunk of meat from community feasts was salted and hung above the cooking fire in the traditional kitchen. This cured meat is added to boiled grains: white beans, black beans, mung beans, among others. It is also an ingredient in the famous chicken dish *pinikpikan*.

Empowering indigenous educators

Under the project, the TFIP and PIKP also held workshops for teachers and community educators on how to keep their indigenous knowledge and practices alive. The teachers shared the lessons and challenges in implementing IP education, while community educators shared various ways of transferring knowledge to the youth.

They also organized the Tawid: Indigenous Knowledge Learning Festival, which was held in August last year at the University of the Philippines-Baguio. The activity served as a venue for indigenous educators, non-government organizations, artists, writers, and artisans to share their experiences in ensuring the continuance of indigenous knowledge.

Cariño said the project proved to be an effective method of producing learning materials for indigenous education while empowering the teachers, students, and community members. She said it allowed them to write their own stories that are "truthful, valuable, and rooted in the local culture."

PIKP is a network of indigenous organizations and individuals in the Cordillera with initiatives for promoting and strengthening indigenous knowledge. TFIP is a national network of 11 NGOs working with indigenous communities to advance indigenous peoples' rights. – **Rappler.com**

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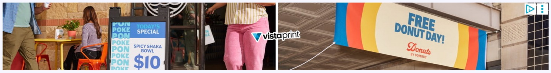

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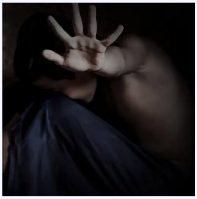

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