

## HERITAGE, DRIVER FOR DEVELOPMENT AND THE CASE OF THE RICE TERRACES OF THE PHILIPPINE CORDILLERAS

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**Abstract.** The paradigm that heritage could be a driver for development is still being understood in many heritage properties. Some World Heritage properties became economically developed after inscription in the World Heritage List while in others, economic benefits have yet to be realized. In the case of the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, development in the property after its international recognition has yet to be appreciated. Prior to inscription, there was high valorization of the property at the national and local level while World Heritage inscription of this cultural landscape has resulted to an increased awareness of its significance as an important heritage of humanity. While development is presently seen in the encroachment of areas in some parts of the property which before were purely used for rice agriculture, irregular development is similarly felt in the form of unregulated infrastructure in some areas within and outside the property. The high significance of the rice terraces, apart from its being a living cultural landscape, impels an envisioned type of development that allows for the conservation of both its cultural and natural values yet allowing natural evolutionary processes to continue including the setting in of economic benefits. The idea of sustainable development comes to mind, but this has yet to be defined. The questions are: What is sustainable development in the rice terraces? If there are models to be emulated, what models of sustainable economic development are apt for the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras? Is sustainable development possible in a property where majority of its people understand and relates development with economic progress and infrastructure development? Is it possible in a place where priority of the living communities is to earn a living and to ensure that the basic needs are met first and foremost? Therefore, this paper attempts to understand the issue of sustainable development in the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras World Heritage property.

### THE WORLD HERITAGE INSCRIPTION OF THE RICE TERRACES OF THE PHILIPPINE CORDILLERAS

The Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras was inscribed in 1995 under criteria (iii), (iv) and (v). The Outstanding Universal Value of the property is seen in its being a dramatic testimony to a community's sustainable and communal system of rice production, based on harvesting water from the forest clad mountain tops that created stone terraces and ponds, a system that has survived for two millennia. The rice terraces are a memorial to the history and labor of more than a thousand generations of small-scale farmers who worked together creating a landscape based on a delicate and sustainable use of natural resources and it is an outstanding example of land-use that resulted from a harmonious interaction between people and its environment which has produced a steep terraced landscape of great aesthetic beauty, now vulnerable to social and economic changes. (Criteria for inscription) The Rice Terraces WH site was placed in the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2001 due to many issues related to socio-economic and changes in lifestyles of people.

From then on, the State Party of the Philippines and the local community have extended much effort in removing it from the Danger List. A 10 year period was given to ameliorate threats to the property's OUV which shall be almost over by 2011 yet uncertainty exists on how the cultural and landscape values in this living and organically evolving property will be conserved and sustained for the long term after it has been finally removed of the List of World Heritage in Danger.

In 2006, a list of corrective measures was proposed, approved and adopted by the Committee in its 34th Session. The provincial government of Ifugao has reported significant accomplishment of the corrective measures but questions prevail on the sustainability of the values of the property being a living cultural landscape.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE RICE TERRACES

Sustainable development was defined by the Brundtland Commission as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Being a cultural landscape, sustainable development in the Rice Terraces means providing for the essential development needs of the people without putting much pressure on the natural and cultural environment. It allows continuity of traditional practices and the natural infusion of evolutionary changes. Sustainability is closely related with such terminologies as the 'conservation of the OUV' of WH properties but moves on to include 'regulated economic development' as consideration of the other peoples' needs.

In particular as a WH site, sustainable development in the Rice Terraces is maintained when the WH cluster sites are not overly populated and this maybe be seen when rice paddies and forests remain intact. Sustainable development is also about traditions of the Ifugao being continuously practiced, yet allowing for a managed blending of new practices as part of the natural evolutionary processes of living cultural landscapes. It is likewise associated with economic progress within rural environments where people live in economically stable conditions. In more particular terms, it is seen when children achieve good education even within rural settings, in having quality food on the table, in having acceptable shelter conditions which may not necessarily be modern and where traditional housing co-exist with the non-traditional but reflecting an organic evolution of settlements, in the good health and well being of community members, and in meeting the essential infrastructure needs of a community which are designed in harmony with the environment. Economic sustainability for the Rice Terraces may also be achieved through the development of cultural industries envisioned to ultimately boost income for the people. And lastly, sustainable development is also related to meeting the UN Millennium Development Goal within a rural setting where traditional cultures and natural values co-exist.

Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable development, a healthy synergetic relationship between old cultural traditions and the naturally evolved new ones would have to be achieved to allow for a balance between the conservation of cultural and natural values and economic progress.

## HERITAGE AS A DRIVER FOR PROGRESS IN THE RICE TERRACES

### *A systems approach to managing the Rice Terraces*

Ifugao traditional system of agriculture, its activities and rituals (*hongan di page*) were based on the regular course of nature and on the lunar cycle which resulted to robust harvests sustaining peoples for generations. People lived simply in the past and solely relied on agriculture and hunting for sustenance, with practically all days made available for the maintenance of the fields.

Present demands however require other means to survive and to address society's needs related to education, sustenance, health and the other necessities. This impedes the ability of the people to meet the regular maintenance requirements of the rice terraces. And with increasing issues associated with climate change, a tendency for concerns to pile up usually happens. Complexities of the present require a systematic approach that could help address management work. This could be developed by bearing in mind both the traditional model and modern day programmed approaches that consider the many new challenges currently faced by the rice terraces.

In particular, it is to be noted that the rate of undertaking rehabilitation work of collapsed terraced areas is affected by the availability of resources to address the work. Therefore, as more areas are subjected to erosion and landslides, rehabilitation work becomes directly proportional to the resources needed for it. Corollary to this is the ability of farmers to perform traditional agricultural cooperative work such as the *ubbu* which becomes indirectly proportional to the rate of increase of large-scale damages. This means that as more and more large-scale collapses happen, the ability of the farmers to do their work following traditional cooperative models that are without assistance from government is lessened while government would have to secure more resources to address an increasing rate of damaged areas.

Programs and a prioritization scheme could be designed so that a restoration system will be set in place while allowing for new concerns to come in. Scheduling of activities is therefore critical, now based on a changing environment affected by climatic variations, the available manpower and financial resources. A study of this would have to be conducted so that a systems approach to management that includes resource generation, allocation and mobilization could be applied. A probability study could also be performed to generate knowledge of prevailing environmental conditions as well as to anticipate threats and risks which could set the basis for the provision of resources.

And finally, as more resources are needed to maintain the Rice Terraces, a surge for economic development to come into the Province of Ifugao is also desired to augment resource allocation concerns that at present come from external sources. This could happen outside the buffer areas to be identified for the WH cluster sites but this may take years before it could actually be realized. Present needs of the Rice Terraces could therefore compel development for the Province of Ifugao so that through it, heritage could be conserved and maintained over time. Yet because of the fragility and vulnerability of this heritage to change, an imminent need to identify the



*Collapsed rice terraces badly needing rehabilitation (left) and a rehabilitation project (right)*

right and appropriate kind development having the least impact on heritage is forthcoming. A balance of both the conservation and lifetime maintenance of heritage and the setting in of development would have to be devised so that all these will synergistically help in sustaining the cultural and natural values of the place.

#### **The traditional *ubbu* and the present RTOs as drivers for sustainability**

The role of farmers in building the rice terraces has been highlighted in the Criteria for inscription (see preceding paragraphs). At present, these farmers who are formally titled by government as Rice Terrace Owners (RTO) have been recognized as essential not only in maintaining the rice terraces but also in attaining a balance between traditional and modern systems currently in place. In the past, farmers ensure that traditional cooperative activities such as the *ubbu*, the *dang-a*, and the *baddang* thrive. The *ubbu* is the traditional cooperative way by which the rice terraces are maintained during pre/post-harvest months, while the *dang-a*, and the *baddang* are instrumental in ensuring that work is undertaken during harvest season. In all these the community labor together to attain good rice harvest, while working on areas needing immediate rehabilitation.

At present, it is the RTOs that attest to the success of rehabilitation work when collapse occurs. Rehabilitation projects are tendered by local governments where RTOs become implementers and act as laborers for their own land, the exact concept of the *ubbu* system, except where at present money is exchanged for rendered labor. Farmers supply materials (hewn or cut stone) needed for rehabilitation work. With the present modern concept, the RTOs as a group or organization earn 10% profit from the funds provided to them by the local government. There is transmission and evolution of the traditional concept of work to the present system. It is notable that the RTOs

complete the projects by covering an area that is normally bigger than what has been agreed upon in contract. This is due to the workers' being direct beneficiaries of the project. The 10% profit earned from the proceeds of the project is also being invested in other income generating endeavors that equally benefit the community as a whole.

This current system that works for the advantage of the rice terraces and the people themselves creates a new perspective for the traditional cooperative system –the *ubbu*. However, unlike the *ubbu* where no money is exchanged, the sustainability of the present system is assured through Local Government Units' (LGUs) support or by external funding assistance.

In small areas where collapse, landslide and erosion occur, the same RTOs help restore the damage, the exact way by which the *ubbu* was performed in the past. However, in large scale landslides where collapsed areas cover as much as tens to hundreds of paddies, LGU aid is sought for rehabilitation work. The challenge comes with the availability of funds to support big project areas and at times, large collapses are normally left to years of neglect due to fund constraints. These are most often left for nature to take over.

#### **Ifugao traditional settlements as model to address demographic changes**

Traditional settlements in Ifugao come in two forms – the clustered and the dispersed. Clustering of houses are found in the WH sites of Kiangnan, Hungdwan and Banaue-in Batad and in Bangaan, while the dispersed type is found in Mayoyao.

Clustered settlements are characterized by a grouping of houses built close to each other. Clusters are found in the periphery of rice terraces which are normally close to



privately owned forests (*muyong*) and areas for planting vegetables and crops. The houses within were traditionally made of indigenous materials found in the area. Together with these are found accessory structures such as the toilet, the pig pen and other minor outhouses to contain animals. Below housing settlements are the rice paddies covering contiguous terraced areas that follow the slope of the land.

In dispersed settlements, houses are separate from each other and interspersed with the terraces that similarly follow the contours of mountains and hills. The forests, both private and publicly owned are found in the periphery of a clustering of rice terraces.

There are advantages to the traditional concept of settlement in Ifugao. Firstly for the clustered, familial relationships were

strengthened through the nearness of relatives to each other which equally paved for the flourishing of cultural practices and the different Ifugao cooperative systems. This was essential in the upkeep and expansion of the rice fields as family members helped in its maintenance while their growing needs ensured spread of the terraces to cover formerly untilled areas.

And in the clustered system, the closeness of houses to each other allowed for less impact on the natural environment surrounding the settlements, as well as areas identified for rice and crop planting. There was a clear distinction between the housing and agricultural areas and these did not extend beyond the other's sphere in terms of use, function and territorial boundaries. Similarly, an interlinked relationship also existed between these where the existence of each component was founded on the sustainable use of



Traditional clustering of settlements - the villages of Bangaan (left) and Batad (right)



A settlement in Mayoyao

each other's resources. What was apparent in the past as in the present is the harmonious and balanced co-existing connection between the different land uses which equally paved way to a unified culture based development that was founded on traditional agricultural and forest management practices.

On the other hand in the Mayoyao model, the rice terraces are surrounded by forests yet houses are interspersed within rice paddies, a clear distinction from the clustering found in the other 4 WH sites of Banaue, Hungduan and Mayoyao. The dispersed nature of settlements in Ifugao as exemplified in the Mayoyao rice terraces was thought of as a strategy to address security concerns. Intruders who came close to Mayoyao had difficulty assaulting rice field owners who had their houses constructed close to the fields but dispersedly located from the others. This nearness of the houses to the terraces had another advantage in that it aided ease of maintenance of the rice plants. In the past, very few houses existed in relation to the amount of terraces within Mayoyao and a balanced and harmonious relationship co-existed between the natural and cultural aspects of the landscape. As there were few houses in Mayoyao in those times, the overlapping of land uses did not exist between housing settlements and areas meant for agriculture, and in the same manner, between what was developed and intervened by man and what is of nature.

A present trend in settlement patterns is now being observed in the WH cluster sites. Land owners claim this to be a result of the insufficiency of 'owned' land within old settlement sites for the building of new houses. These new trends however, do not follow traditional settlement patterns and a disparity in model can be seen as formerly clustered settlements remain in their former locations while new houses are being constructed

within rice terrace paddies which in the past solely remained as areas for rice planting. Specifically, this new trend is occurring in the cluster site of Hapao in the municipality of Hungduan. Here, formerly clustered settlements found at the periphery of the rice terraces remain without much increase in their size and in the number of houses despite an increase in need for new housing. However, new houses have sprouted within the rice terrace paddies which formerly were solely used for rice planting. A conversion from rice terrace to 'house paddy' is now observed in this cluster site.

In Mayoyao on the other hand, another trend is happening where the formerly few dispersed houses are now increasing in numbers as new ones are built within the rice terraces. This new trend is apparently gearing towards the formation of clustering as a result of more houses being built nearby existing ones.

To summarize, in the 4 WH cluster sites of Hungduan, Kiangnan, Batad and Banaan in the municipality of Banaue, clustering of settlements was a tradition that at present is slowly transforming in Hungduan due to demographic changes, while in Mayoayo, its former state of intermittently dispersed housing in the rice terraces is now being altered as more houses are built into the landscape creating unclear forms of clustering. In all these cases, it is clear that the traditional model is much more sustainable in the long term due to an apparent harmonious relationship existing between settlements and the natural and agricultural environment.

Related to settlement patterns is the Ifugao house, an archetypical abode that exemplifies best practice in housing design. The ifugao house is a one-room structure which space acts as a sleeping, gathering and eating place for a small Ifugao family. Within its interior space are pockets of areas



*Increasing number of houses within rice fields in Hungduan*



for storage and cooking. The different levels of the house manifest the Ifugao's understanding of his cosmic and earthly world. Each level of the house from the ground to the roof structure signifies a place on earth and of the heavens. This house however, no longer fits a modern day Ifugao. However, its traditional design invites much attention and potential for the present and future needs of the people. The use of indigenous materials for its house construction is in itself a green technology that merits inspiration for present day designers.

The traditional Ifugao house, although much more appreciated in the past for its functional nature as an abode, could now be transformed to a new compatible evolved use, still as a dwelling but of use for tourism. This new use however is subject to discourse in the conservation world as some prefer the continuity of its old function as a residence while discouraging its exploitation for tourism. Nevertheless, while giving much more thought to the present needs of the people, support from the academe and the government has paved way to new design adaptations of Ifugao traditional houses appropriate for the rice terraces (see above illustration). These

are seen in guidelines prepared in 2009 for new dwellings in the WH cluster sites.

Traditional settlements as well as Ifugao dwellings clearly show sustainable patterns in building that provide good lessons and models to be followed in new housing and settlement developments. In consideration of addressing demographic changes, these could be emulated and considered in the present by the communities who live in the rice terraces and by the government and other stakeholders as well.

#### **Traditional forest management for heritage sustainability and industry development**

As the natural environment surrounding the rice terraces is of much importance as the culture of the people, its sustainability is therefore in equal footing as that of the rice paddies and cultural traditions. This is because water drawn from the forests which are the watersheds sustains the rice terraces. Forests and waterways should therefore be maintained healthy. The planting of indigenous timber species that retain water should be upheld while the introduction of plant species



*A modified traditional Ifugao house (above) and Proposed design adaptations of the traditional Ifugao house (below) (taken from the Infrastructure Guidelines for the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, 2009)*

that draw water from the ground should be discouraged.

Similarly, traditional forest management is the answer to wood harvesting. One of the ways by which economic progress is foreseen to come into the Province of Ifugao is through the development of its cultural industries. Ifugaos are known wood carvers and trees from surrounding forests are its source for the carving industry. So long as traditional practices in forest resource harvesting are performed, the forests could sustain its resources while equally assisting in providing for the needs of the people.

And as forests provide wood needed to repair houses and for the carving industry, a select number of species could be identified and inventoried so that a systematic approach to wood harvesting could be undertaken. Too much harvesting from privately owned forests could lead to deforestation but the continuous replanting of the same indigenous species would address the concern. UNESCO has identified reforestation as one of the Corrective Measures that would have to be accomplished by the State Party for removal of the property from the Danger List. Reforestation has taken place in some areas in Ifugao but resource mapping would have to be undertaken alongside the constant monitoring of *muyongs* (privately owned forests) to determine the extent of harvest already done and the areas where reforestation would have to be undertaken. Here, land use management comes into play while the GIS technology could help in resource mapping. With the presence of healthy forests, the Rice Terraces and the communities would end up healthy as well.

#### A window for intangible cultural heritage in sustainable development

Being an organically evolving cultural landscape, the Rice Terraces and the Ifugao cultural traditions is continuously affected by external pressures but nonetheless there are thriving cultural practices that exist to the present, some of which may have evolved to a different state. These cultural practices are being sustainably maintained through revival efforts initiated by the government in collaboration with the local communities. They come into play and help maneuver the course of action for the future of the place and its people.

One form of cultural practice is the ceremonial rituals which are used as a means of uniting cosmic and ancestor worship with earthly needs. Ifugao people sought the help of the Gods and their ancestors in all aspects of their lives most especially during the agricultural cycle where a good harvest was desired. Ancestor and deity blessings paved way to the conduct of earthly activities as these too had to have their esteem. The *baki* ritual is performed by *mumbakis* or native priests who offer butchered animals to the Gods and ancestors while chanting and drinking rice wine in between deliveries. As traditionally done, only the *mumbakis* and members of the family and those concerned with the activity stay during the ritual.

The *baki* ritual has been recognized as part of the outstanding universal values of the Rice Terraces because of its being indispensable in the traditional agricultural way of life of the Ifugaos, At present, it has become part of



*Balance between nature and culture ensures a healthy environment*



cultural performances when acted during dances to show to an audience how it was originally performed.

Together with the rituals are the different cultural performances that have become an essential stamp of a trip to the Ifugao mountains. Initially, cultural performances were carried out only during culturally related activities for their own personal or familial purpose. Nowadays however, this has become a must see attraction as one visits the province. Weddings, engagement ceremonies, and everyday activities are depicted in dances and plays which give a colorful glimpse of the traditional Ifugao way of life. Vibrant exchanges in movements, in the use of colorful costumes and in the implements, show the richness of Ifugao traditions. The fascinating tale of the Ifugao way of life as seen in the *baki* ritual and in Ifugao cultural performances could actually inspire people from different parts of the world to know more about the Rice Terraces. And as a driver for tourism these performances and rituals could become the prime reason for development to set in place.

### Traditional building practices as model for new infrastructure

While the present state of the Ifugao WH sites shows the need for the provision of essential infrastructure, a balanced development is desired so that the prime reason for conservation will not be compromised in the process of allowing for the setting in of economic progress.

One infrastructure need is the improvement of traditional roads in the Rice Terraces. Because of the prevalent weather condition of the place, these roads frequently subjected to rainfall constantly deteriorate. With regular use as means for transporting goods and people, these are most often compromised by potholes. And as they cut across mountains with sides naturally unconsolidated, they are forever prone to landslides.

The manner by which these traditional roads were paved allowed for sustainable movement in the WH cluster sites and regulated the flow of impact from external surroundings. This allowed for a self sustaining way by



*The baki ritual which is essential for the survival of agricultural traditions*



which local communities lived without much influence from the external.

Local communities however, long for concretely paved roads as these allow convenience of movement of goods and people to and from the area. But concrete roads could lead to uncontrolled development along roadways of the WH cluster sites, which could also be avoided through the formulation and strict implementation of land use and zoning controls. Regulations are most especially needed on land areas adjacent road networks where sporadic building construction could arise.

Similarly within the World Heritage cluster sites are schools established to offer basic education system. In Kiangnan and in Batad and Bangaan in Banaue are found elementary schools while Hungduan and Mayoyao have both primary and secondary schools. For Kiangnan and the two Banaue cluster sites, secondary education is obtained at the nearest town center – the *poblacion* and school children travel kilometers to attain secondary education. This system has prevailed for decades and it has in fact achieved resiliency of values where people have realized the hard work associated with attaining education.



Cultural performances as a driver for tourism

Health centers on the other hand are available within the culture sites, but the structures built for them come in modest form. The availability of health facilities becomes a concern when a community member afflicted with illness would have to be brought kilometers to a reliable health center in the nearest *poblacion* or town.

As provision for these kinds of infrastructure becomes a necessity at the Rice Terraces, the kind and type of construction system is also an important consideration that has to be taken into account. Clearly good reliable road systems, schools and health centres are drivers for development and are most needed in remote rural areas such as the Rice Terraces. Guidelines as to their

construction and design should be clearly set to direct governments and the people on what are appropriate for the place. Similarly, controls as to their numbers, size and impact on the site, including the carrying capacity of the place should be greatly considered so that the rural quality of the landscape is maintained and preserved.

#### ***Tinawon*, the heritage crop and other culturally associated industries as motivators of development**

The *tinawon* rice has been recognized as being essential in preserving the traditional agricultural practices of the Ifugaos. It is only with the *tinawon* rice variety that the rituals of the agricultural cycle (the *hongan di page*) are performed.



Traditionally paved roads

Apart from the outstanding cultural significance of the *tinawon*, it has been found to have very high nutritious value that makes it attractive to the local and foreign market. Its once-a-year cropping makes it more valuable as a rare commodity but in a way equally deters economic sustainability for the people. Nevertheless, its very high nutritive quality makes up for its low quantity harvest when sold as a prime and highly priced commodity.

At the Rice Terraces, low lying portions have been planted with the high yield (two or three times a year) cropping rice varieties. The augmentation of crop revenues from the *tinawon* variety could therefore be achieved by encouraging its planting in these lower areas.

Relatedly, as the place is rich in a variety of vegetable and plant resources, by-products have now been developed as sources of revenue for the communities. Available rice and vegetable by-products are the rice wine, rice and vegetable cakes and others which are continuously being improved and offered as highly marketable commodities. These not only encourage economic development but bring in cultural development as well. Other vegetable and plant by-products related to the cosmetic, health and wellness industries could be developed and packaged for the local, national and global market as well.

In the same manner culturally associated industries such as wood carving and weaving help set economic development.

Ifugao wood carvings and traditional weaves have been recognized in the country and are being sold in city centres outside the Province such as in Baguio. The need to continuously improve these products through the exposure of carvers and weavers to trainings and quality development workshops is most needed. Making available new trading centres for marketing these products will also encourage the development and improvement of product lines that are acceptable and within standards of the global market.

### **Conclusion: The Ifugao heritage trait as driver for development**

On the issue of sustainable development in the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, it is apparent from the preceding discourse that the model to be emulated and considered apt for this WH site is a combination of its own traditional model combined with new approaches that could boost economic progress for the place. Lessons and good examples learned from the rich way of life and sustainable living of the Ifugao people could be passed on to the present and future generations while regulated economic growth through a managed infusion of new development and the sustainable use of resources may be permitted in consideration of the present needs of the people and the natural evolutionary processes taking place at the Rice Terraces.

As the site is rich in cultural and natural resources, sustainable



development could only be made possible when majority of the people understand that the richness of their past and their surroundings will have to be conserved and protected while jointly embracing economic progress. And with concerns for impact on the occasion that economic progress is attained, allowing for a regulated type of development would be the answer for the conservation and protection of heritage. Lastly, the possibility of attaining sustainable development is very high at the Rice Terraces despite the present state of living communities where earning a living and ensuring for

the provision of their most basic needs comes foremost in their lives. This is because of the amazing inherent trait of the people which it in itself have made possible the construction of their magnificent rice terraces – their resiliency and perseverance to achieve greatness coupled with their pride and high appreciation of their ancestral heritage. This trait would therefore be the prime driver that would achieve good results in heritage conservation and sustainable development.



*Income generators for the Rice Terraces: the tinawon and the Ifugao traditional weaving industry*

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