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# IGOROTA

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## MAGAZINE

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MEANINGFUL  
ENDEAVORS  
AND LESSONS...



#### OUR COVER

The rice fields, rivers, and mountains of the Cordillera highlight the richness of the region.

These represent a positive experiences and convey valuable lessons despite challenges.

Mountains, may face destruction, continue to stand strong, symbolizing human resilience. Rivers, despite being polluted, keep flowing, offering a message of hope. And the rice fields may lose their greenery, but they regain it in the next harvest cycle, reflecting the continuous renewal of life and the ability to overcome adversity.

The opinions expressed in the articles belong to their authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Igorota Foundation.

#### WRITE US!

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## LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEYS

-Ronaldyn Butil-

This issue features a collection of reflections by IGOROTA personnel and its partner communities, highlighting their diverse experiences in international travel, community fieldwork, and engagement with pressing local issues. Each narrative explores the personal journeys of these individuals as they navigate challenges and the lessons they learn along the way.

These stories go beyond simple storytelling; they reveal how these experiences have profoundly shaped their lives and perspectives. Each account not only recounts events but also shares valuable lessons and growth. Moreover, these stories align with IGOROTA's mission to promote women's empowerment through transformative training, education, advocacy, and organizing towards holistic development for self-sustaining communities in the Cordilleras.

In the following pages, we recount the first trip abroad of one staff to Penang, Malaysia, where she attended a workshop that focused on fostering learning exchanges and showcasing initiatives that transform food systems and provide sustainable climate solutions, particularly through agroecology. She gained valuable insights into different cultures, enriching her understanding of global issues concerning local challenges.

Another staff shares her fieldwork story, drawing inspiration from the women's organization in Bila, Bokod, as well as the breathtaking beauty of the area.

We also learn from the organic farmer from Hungduan, Ifugao who discusses her personal experience with sustainable agriculture, emphasizing profitable practices that produce healthy yields while conserving soil nutrients.

Moreover, we reflect on the essence of womanhood while relating a touching story of sacrifice, dedication, and a mother's unwavering love for her children. Meanwhile, a partner from Mayoyao, Ifugao highlights the journey of a successful woman motivated by her community's challenges and her commitment to service.

Digging deeper, we will discover the significance of chewing betel nuts in Mayoyao, Ifugao; the collaborative efforts in recovering a watershed in Barangay Aduyongan; the successful struggle of Palina Kibungan to keep their village free from mining; a call to action to address rising teenage suicide rates; and lastly, the promotion of the adventurous beauty of Mayoyao.

These narratives are closely tied to their personal contexts, showcasing how individual backgrounds and experiences shape their approach to community development. The reflections serve as a testament to their dedication and an inspiration for others to engage meaningfully with their communities.

In essence, this issue celebrates personal growth, cultural exchange, and the power of storytelling to foster understanding and inspire action.



# MALAYSIA: INTERACTIONS AND INSIGHTS

**-Georgina Atipen-Cardona-**

Roadway to new experiences.

I have attended different official events like meetings, conferences, and workshops with various organizations, but this journey was different.

It was filled with firsts for me: from checking in a luggage, facing serious Immigration Officers, sitting in a wide long plane, gazing at the cottony clouds, then looking down at tiny sparkling lights and dot-like buildings.

Touchdown - Penang, Malaysia. After four nights and three days of insightful learning exchanges, I safely returned to the Philippines.

Here is my story.

One chilly dawn, while the world outside was dark and silent, I was already wide awake locking up my luggage. I had to catch my reserved seat on the Genesis bus to Terminal 3, NAIA Airport. Passport? Check. Wallet, stuff, and things? all checked.

Before stepping out, I took one last glance in the mirror telling my nervous self to be brave, "I can do this." I calmed my mind and faced the reality of traveling solo and overcoming all these first-time experiences.

I had booked a deluxe bus to ensure comfort, knowing there would be more long hours ahead before reaching Malaysia. The air-conditioning was cold, but I managed to sleep soundly until the sunrise sparkled through the window and woke me up. I realized that I already arrived in Manila.

By the way, I thought I would be traveling solo the entire time initially. But as luck would have it, a fellow participant based in Manila confirmed her attendance at the last minute. She became my travel companion. I waited for her at the airport and a beautiful young woman, likely in her 20s, approached me and called my name. Her sweet smile immediately reassured me that she was the one I would be traveling with.

We introduced ourselves and had a quick chat about the process of checking in luggages and going through immigration. She was well-versed in international travel, so I was grateful to have her by my side.

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As a first-time flyer, the Immigration Officer needed to check my IDs and other documents. "Malaysia, at Georgetown Cititel Hotel, Penang, for a workshop on documenting agroecological practices in Asian rural communities as a climate solution," I explained. Soon enough, my passport was stamped.

Seeing the airport for the first time and boarding the plane made me dream that as if I was going abroad to work for good. I enjoyed every moment, from the takeoff to the sightseeing through the plane window, all while savoring our pre-booked hot meal. We safely landed in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was here that I noticed how much stricter Philippine immigration is compared to Malaysia's.

It was nearly 6 PM, and we had a 3-4-hour layover for our connecting flight to Penang. We then decided to have dinner to recharge before arriving in Penang. We ate at OLDTOWN White Coffee Restaurant. I was glad I had exchanged my pesos for ringgit back at the old market in Baguio, Philippines which allowed me to pay for our hot satisfying bowls of noodles. I opted not to buy a roaming SIM card, relying instead on the free airport WiFi. We exchanged stories about our work, advocacy, and the programs of the organizations we represented while we waited for our next flight.

As our flight to Penang was announced, we prepared for the final 1-2-hour leg of the journey. However, it took only about 48 minutes as the captain informed us to prepare for the landing. The event's Secretariat was well-organized and ensured smooth logistics. A car with a sign labeled "PANAP" (Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific) waited for us outside. PANAP is one of the five regional centers of the global network dedicated to eliminating human and environmental harm caused by pesticides.

We arrived at the luxurious venue. Exhausted but happy, we headed straight to our cozy rooms for some rest after an enjoyable yet tiring journey.

The next day, we were greeted with a buffet breakfast. Aside from the delicious food, what caught my attention was the coffee machine—a robot! It was quite different from what we have in the Philippines. You just have to place your mug and press a button for your preferred flavor—white coffee, cappuccino, latte, macchiato, and more. If I had a chance to take home a souvenir from Malaysia, that machine would be at the top of my list!

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Participants from the 23 Organizations in 9 Countries listening to the lecture of the Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Resilience

As my phone beeped, I saw a message in the WhatsApp group chat from the Secretariat calling the participants to gather as the event was about to start. "I am Georgina of IGOROTA Foundation, Inc. from the Philippines, pleased to meet you all," self-introduction as usual. There were 23 other organizations from 9 countries across Asia that attended. I was confused by the different accents at first but as the minutes passed, I got used to them and was able to go with the activity flow.

### Eye-opening Knowledge and Reflections

The workshop aimed to bring together learning exchanges and showcase people-led initiatives that transform food systems and provide just, long-term climate solutions. Agroecology was highlighted as one of these solutions. While many rural communities around the world practice agroecology, they often lack support from policymakers, who favor chemical-intensive farming, groundwater-dependent irrigation, and corporate agriculture. A double effort to promote agroecology as a climate solution is a must, to encourage more communities to adopt, and push governments to support various agroecology efforts and advocacies.

I was proud to witness Filipino speakers at the forefront of these discussions. They explained their presentations clearly and informatively. It made me smile when a participant from Vietnam compared Doc. Chito (Charito Medina), one of the resource speakers, to Spiderman. When asked why, she simply said, "because you know a lot." Spiderman might have been the best word she could use to describe him.



Philippine representatives are brainstorming for the climate shocks and agroecological practices being experienced and applied in their Country.

During the workshop, we were grouped by country to conduct a situational analysis of climate shocks/stress and the agroecological practices we experienced and applied in our respective locations. I contributed what I know based on IGOROTA Foundation's areas of operation. For the overall output of the Philippines, the identified stresses were mining, dams, La Niño, La Niña, government policies, monocropping, and reclamation projects. The agroecological practices highlighted included soil fertility management, diversified farming systems, seed trial farms for resilient crop development, networking and linking, legal and mass movements, bungkalan (collective land cultivation), IEC and *bagsakan* (local markets), and indigenous/traditional farming practices.

Each group representative presented and explained what had been brainstormed. This was followed by a question-and-answer, clarification, and thought-raising session. It saddened me to realize that the selfishness of some people driven by fame and money, has caused our resources to suffer. As Pope Francis said, "The cry of the Earth is the cry of the poor." Underdeveloped or poor countries are indeed the ones that suffer the most.

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Customs taken during the International Festival for  
People's Rights and Struggles

Afterward, there was a presentation of the documentation guide on farmers' adaptation, mitigation, and resilience to climate change through agroecology and biodiversity monitoring tools. Additional workshops and a comprehensive synthesis were also conducted.

We participated in the closing of the International Festival for People's Rights and Struggles on our last day. During the sharing session, a woman from Palestine spoke about the children of Gaza, many of whom have lost their families and are left without anyone to call their own. She described how they live in constant fear, traumatized by the sounds of guns, cannons, and explosions. My heart broke for these innocent children. We all raised our voices, "Free, free Palestine!" I was overwhelmed, realizing that the world we hoped would be peaceful was instead consumed by hatred and war. Don't we all deserve peace?

As part of the festival, a forum was held where representatives from Indonesia and other countries shared their struggles against land and resource grabbing, particularly affecting vulnerable groups. Indonesia, one of the world's top palm oil producers has faced massive deforestation, clearing hectares upon hectares of some of the planet's most biodiverse forests. This destruction threatens the habitat of endangered species such as the orangutans and rhinos. It is saddening to think of these creatures losing their homes just to produce palm oil for the production of unhealthy snacks. Shame on us, humans.

The forum was an eye-opener, making me deeply reflect on the harsh realities of our world.

Despite feeling overwhelmed and saddened by these issues, I am grateful to have been chosen as one of the representatives from the Philippines. It was an unforgettable experience, not just for the learning but also for the exposure to different cultures which include languages and foods.

After the event, my travel buddy and I visited the market where we bought souvenirs and sampled various local delicacies. Eventually, we returned to the hotel to pack up and prepare for our journey back to the Philippines.

I came back home safely, ready to share the things I learned from the enriching event.

Someday, I hope to establish my own organic farm, applying everything I learned during our trip. I would get it accredited and make it a model farm for others.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my travel companion, Ms. Genie—who, by the way, is not 20, but 40 years old!//

## DRIVING CHANGE AS IGOROTA'S PROJECT OFFICER

**-Marjorie Kissing-**

Traveling is a sort of education.

Bisal is a place in Bokod, Benguet that I never visited until I became part of the IGOROTA family in the year 2022. I was nervous when I arrived in the place because the road was covered with fallen pine needles with their rough roots spread out; it looked dangerous.

As I made my way there, I regretted missing the chance to appreciate the beauty of the mountains as I was too focused on the refreshing air against my face. When I opened my eyes, I was thrilled to realize we were near Barangay Bisal.

After a while, we arrived at the welcome arch boldly written, "Welcome to Bisal". The crisp air, the cool flowing rivers, the sweet fruits, and the warm hospitality of the people created a welcoming atmosphere. This environment inspired and motivated me to continue my work as a Project Officer.

This was another breathtaking moment in my life. The motorists were friendly and considerate. Some volunteered to drive us to barangay Bobok and they would even take us to Bila during the rainy season. I was delighted to encounter such warm and caring people and hoped that their kindness would continue to shine throughout the community.

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Bridge in Bisal that connects people in their daily lives



IGOROTA Foundation, Inc. has been a valued partner agency of the BIBACWA Women's Organization since 2009. IFI's mission is to empower women through transformative training, education, advocacy, and community organizing. The four programs: Ancestral Domain, Gender and Development, Social Enterprise, and Sustainable Agriculture play a significant role towards a sustainable development of the partner communities.

As Project Officers, we visit the community to facilitate meetings and activities that the Foundation aims to share with the partner women. I observed the community's enthusiasm and engagement during every visit. Each activity concluded with productive agreements and a sense of satisfaction. After the meetings and activities, we gathered together to share stories and experiences, enjoy fresh local fruits, and take home any surplus. I hope this community remains humble and continues to thrive, carrying forward what I have taught them for the betterment of all.

Traveling has been a form of education for me, as it took me to places, I did not plan to visit. I have empowered women and supported them in meaningful ways through implementing the Foundation's advocacy. I also encountered and addressed misunderstandings among women partners, gaining insights into their attitudes and interactions. This experience allowed me to improve my social and leadership skills, handle challenges more effectively, and appreciate criticisms for self-improvement. Most importantly, it has provided financial support for both myself and my family.//



The BIBACWA Women's Organization, along with the IGOROTA staff in their purple uniforms.  
Ms. Marjorie (standing left) is the author.

## COST-EFFECTIVE, HEALTHY PRODUCE WHILE CONSERVING SOIL NUTRIENTS

-Esther Humiding-

Believe it or not, she is not using synthetic fertilizers nor expensive techniques, but still producing high-quality organic agricultural products.

It is a dream that all farmers adopt the same method to ensure healthy production without harming the soil.

A woman farmer in Hungduan, Ifugao is never tempted to apply the monocropping of high-value crops and planting of high-breed rice. She even does not use any commercial fertilizers and pesticides but still produces quality vegetables, crops, livestock, shells, snails, and heirloom rice with bountiful harvests that are competitive in the market world with high income from it.

She is from Hapao, Hungduan and she learned these processes of indigenous agriculture from her grandparents and parents from a young age until she continued to practice as she grew up.

She integrates diversified crops and assorted vegetables in her farms with decomposed grasses, shrubs, composted animal waste, and bio-organic materials/resources as her fertilizers. This is similar with her rice fields where she integrates rice, fish, shells, and mollusks (*ginga*) to be able to attain the needed bio-organic fertilizers. While doing these, she also raises poultry and livestock.

To meet the plant's fertilizer needs, she employs a cyclical food chain system, utilizing decomposed animal and poultry waste as fertilizer. She, in turn, feeds her animals and poultry with plants grown on her farm. She uses vegetable stems and leaves which were removed during harvest clean-up to feed the Japanese fish (*yuyu*) and *ginga*.

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Actual photo of the Imbagiw Farm taken by Juana Daping, IGOROTA's Area Coordinator



Aside from producing healthy crops and vegetables for her family and for other people, she at the same time, gains double income from the sales of her produce.

Based on her experiences and observations, the greenhouse is very important in organic vegetable farming. The vegetable crops under the protection of a greenhouse are robust with just little organic farm inputs as compared to the vegetable plants exposed to rays of the sun, winds, and heavy rainfalls that need plenty of organic inputs and other approaches.

In the year 2023, her farm was discovered by the Department of Agriculture specifically the Agriculture Training Institute at La Trinidad, Benguet which accredited the farm known as, “Imbagiw Farm”. It became a registered Training Institution as an organic farm catering to local and foreign students and researchers on organic farming.

Organic farming is beneficial where a farmer gains a satisfying life compared to some of the conventional farmers costing them a lot of money for the inputs that sadly often lead them into debt.

This organic farmer is satisfied not just by her source of income but also by producing healthy food for her family’s table and for others. At the same time, without poisoning the soil.

The person behind this story is the author herself, who wants to inspire other farmers by using her organic agricultural methods/techniques.

I end this sharing by saying, "We have connected things to consider – our environment, our children, and our health. If we destroy the soil and produce synthesized farm-to-table foods, it has a domino effect. It poisons our health, it kills us! Others might say there is no money from it but I say, as an experienced organic farmer, even doubles your income if you work on it well.”//



Organic Farm taken by Juana Daping

## ESSENCE OF BEING A WOMAN

-Sheryl Pindog-

March 8 is celebrated as International Women's Day. It is to honor a woman's journey through her life, achievements, struggles, freedom, and rights. It is to celebrate womanhood.

Womanhood is being able to combine gentleness and strength. Gentle because this is a woman's nature and strength because this is what she needs to survive in the real world. It is about making a difference in the world, big or small, and creating happiness for herself and others.

A woman is a friend, sister, daughter, wife, and mother. Within a household, a woman cooks, cleans, nurtures, and disciplines. Within marriage and relationships, she loves, supports, and guides. And within the workplace, she creates, leads, and develops with courage.

Every woman has a purpose, passion, and calling. As they say, "Women are the backbones of the nation and carriers of the next generation."

Being a woman is being powerful and assertive yet kind at the same time. It means being compassionate and vulnerable towards those she loves without feeling weak for doing it. It means striving for her goals even in the face of the struggles she may encounter along the way. Being a woman has not always been easy. In the midst of all these, she has to show that she is strong and powerful!



A true woman is a valuable member of the society. The lady who does not feel bad about herself being physically weak. The girl who aims to live an independent life, free from the control of others. The sister who does not lose her identity. The wife who is not a figure of sacrifice. The daughter who is not insecure of her physical figure but proud of herself and appreciate the way she is. The queen who fights for her rights and brave to face the world because she is a woman. A woman does not need to face the world as a symbol of beauty but as a human with capabilities, knowledge, and skills. She is a warrior, a fighter and a leader. She is free, confident, powerful, strong, and empowered.

The true essence of being a woman is to share and be shared with love, compassion, happiness, kindness, and equality in the whole world. //

Let us read the story of Maria (*next page*).



# SACRIFICE, DEDICATION, AND UNWAVERING LOVE

-Throphea Guintican-

Maria (*not her real name*) is a devoted mother of five - two girls and three boys.



The sweet daughter who graduated as a Nurse and the loving mother, Maria

Her day starts early dawn as she prepares food for her family. She irons her children's uniforms and gets their packed lunches ready. Once these tasks are done, she wakes her children for breakfast and takes them to school. Maria returns home after dropping them off to handle laundry and various house chores such as washing the dishes, cleaning the house and its surroundings, and feeding the livestock. Then, she cooks lunch for her husband who is out in the field.

As her children grew older to continue their schooling to achieve their dreams and aspirations in life, Maria tried to find a job that would help their family with their financial needs.

Joyfully, Maria was hired as one of the IGOROTA Foundation's Project Officers. Now, she has to manage priorities and time between work and family obligations. Through carries out her duties seamlessly. At present, one of her daughter finished her nursing degree and the rest of her children are progressing in their studies.

Aside from supporting and raising her family, she also shares and applies her learning and experiences as a Project Officer inculcating the advocacy of IGOROTA. She, her husband, and their children are helping each other in household chores which include: preparing food, ironing uniforms, doing laundry, cleaning the house, feeding the livestock, and such. Maria emphasizes the importance of good values, and instilling respect for oneself, others, and the environment.

Motherhood often requires massive self-sacrifice. This innate selflessness is a common thread across different cultures and societies. Mothers experience conflicts between their work responsibilities and family obligations, often prioritizing their children's needs over their careers.

Balancing work and family life can be challenging, but Maria is managing it. Handling household duties and a job can be exhausting. Being a mother doesn't come with a salary or honorarium. Yet, Maria's commitment to her children's futures drives her to make any necessary sacrifices, do multitasking and put her dreams on hold to ensure that her children achieve their educational goals and succeed in life. //

## TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

-Florie Jane Maanao-

Karen was a committed woman chasing her dreams. She is from the barrio of Patyay, Mayoyao, Ifugao. She completed her elementary studies and moved on to high school at Assumption Academy of Mayoyao, where she graduated as the class Valedictorian.

Despite her academic success, she faced financial challenges. Both of her parents were working as farmers and that could not afford to send her to college. She then decided to apply for a scholarship offered by the Local Government Unit of Mayoyao. Fortunately, she qualified for the said program.

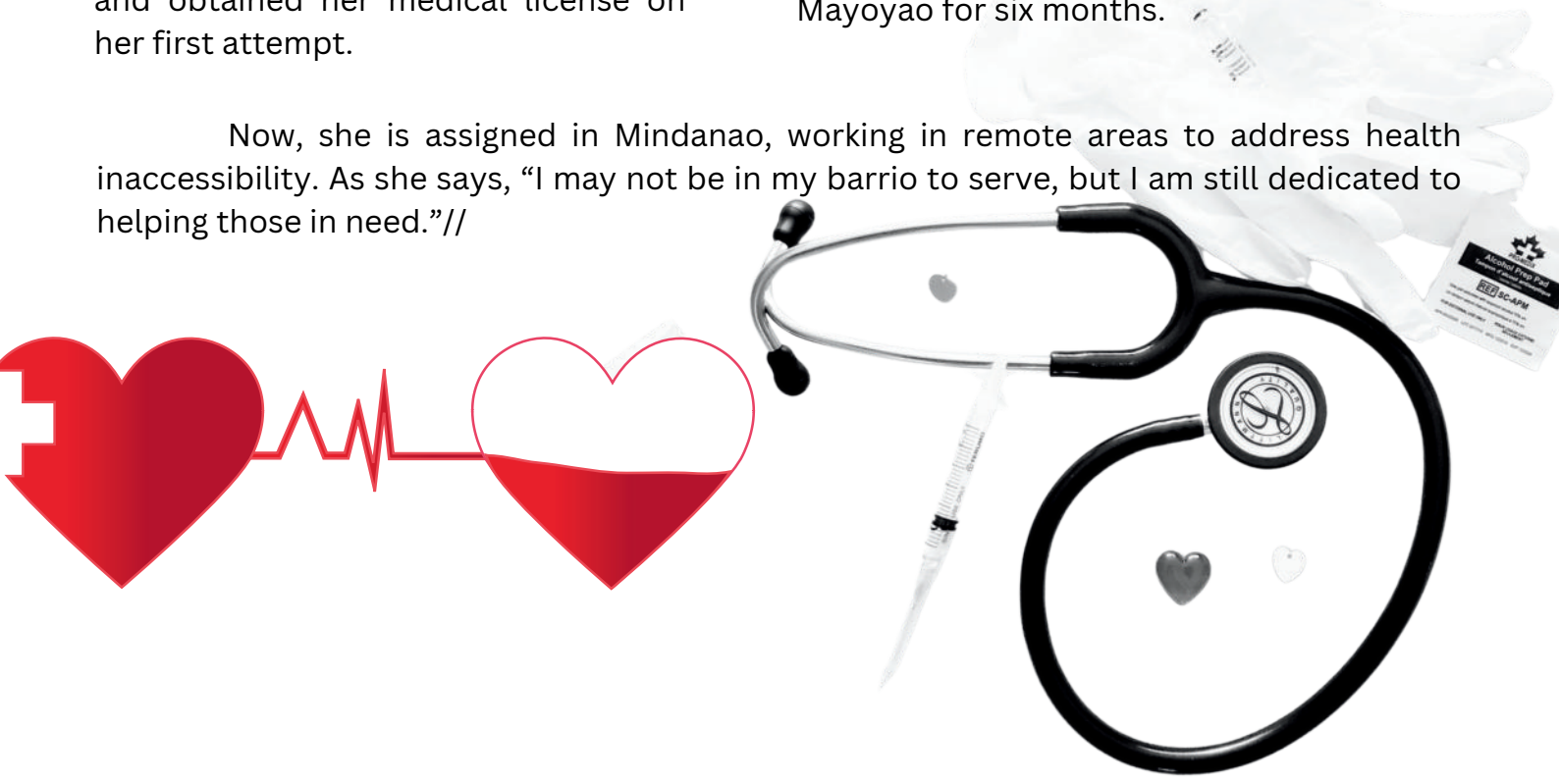
Karen chose to pursue a degree in medicine, knowing it would allow her to serve her hometown and its surrounding barrios. After years of hard work, she completed her degree and obtained her medical license on her first attempt.

Now, she is assigned in Mindanao, working in remote areas to address health inaccessibility. As she says, "I may not be in my barrio to serve, but I am still dedicated to helping those in need."//

Reflecting on her early years, Karen remembers a time when education was scarce, transportation was limited, and basic necessities were hard to come by. In her remote barrio, parents taught their children the importance of hard work, often reminding them by saying, "Keep working hard so you won't starve."

Children in the barrio often went with their parents to barter for food supplies, facing laughter, criticisms, and bullying for wearing torn slippers and clothes. The most challenging experience that Dr. Karen encountered was the lack of access to healthcare. During emergencies, travel from the barrio to the rural center could be dangerous, leading to tragic outcomes or deaths for some.

After being a Licensed Doctor, Dr. Karen returned home and served at the Rural Health Unit for a year and conducted medical missions across the barrios of Mayoyao for six months.





## FORMING BONDS THROUGH *BUYO*: AN IFUGAO TRADITION

-Febelene Maggay-

Chewing betel nut (locally known as *buyo*) is part of Ifugao culture. This practice is not only popular in the Cordilleras but also in some parts of the Philippines and even in other countries.

In Ifugao, chewing betel nut is seen as a traditional way to foster camaraderie and build friendships. According to Ms. Leah (*not her real name*) from Banhal, Mayoyao, she made many friends after she started chewing *buyo*. She became more sociable and it was through this practice that she met her better half. Since then, chewing *buyo* has become part of their bonding, strengthening their relationship.

The term *taluan* which is a container made of cloth, bamboo, or a plastic bag is used to store the ingredients for chewing *buyo*. The main components are betel nut, betel leaf, and lime, though some people choose to add tobacco leaves, ginger, or pandan for added flavor and aroma.

Chewing *buyo* also has a deeper cultural significance. It is often used as a peace offering or a way to reconcile individuals who are not on good terms. Sharing stories and discussing matters over a chew of *buyo* strengthens bonds among friends and family.

For some, this practice serves as a way of improving concentration, relieving stress, or simply aiding focus on tasks.

In modern times, chewing *buyo* has also become a source of income for many. Compared to other vices such as drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes, chewing *buyo* is often considered a better alternative.



Bettle Nut or Buyo

However, regulations around the practice have also evolved. Municipal Ordinance No. 13, s. 2021 in Mayoyao, Ifugao prohibits the spitting of “momma” (chewed betel nut) and improper disposal of *pfu’lak* (betel nut remnants) and *hengkhót* (spit containers) in public places like streets, markets, plazas, sidewalks, and other public spaces. This ordinance was implemented by the Sangguniang Bayan which aims to promote discipline and responsibility concerning waste management.

Chewing betel nut is a tradition that fosters friendships, strengthens family bonds, and provides stress relief for many. However, this cultural practice comes with the responsibility to properly dispose waste, ensuring cleanliness of the environment.//

## FROM STRUGGLES TO INITIATIVES

-Daisy Saldet-



*Magay minas isna kadan mi ay Palina* (No to Mining) signage prohibiting mining company entering the place

*“Uray dakami et di maatalan ya matey dibali tan nabakes ya nakkay kami basta et baken din anan-ak mi.”* This is a statement from an elder leader of Barangay Palina, Kibungan, Benguet that translates, "We, the elders, would rather die and be hit by those vehicle than to allow harm to our children," during their barricading fight against the mining company entering Palina in 2010.

The residents who fought for their land remembered their rough struggles way back when an unauthorized mining company entered Palina and disrupted their harmonious and peaceful lives. Their opposition caused so much pain, sacrifice, and burden. The men of the barangay voluntarily gave up time with their families and nights of restful sleep to protect their land. They stood guard, day and night, with women joining them during daylight hours. Those residents who were unable to go to the barricading gathered at the church, offering prayers for the safety of their frontline co-residents and hoping for a miracle to stop the mining project.

In June 2010, tensions worsened into a physical confrontation when the company's vehicle nearly ran over the residents blocking the gate. The residents got angry and ran after to stop the driver. This gave the mining company a reason to file lawsuits against them. This is when residents who were present during the obstructing and fight over the entry of the company were sued not only to one but to five different courts. Many residents faced financial and emotional challenges. Some of them were not able to go back to their jobs because of the court cases they were facing, some were not able to work on the farm during the hearings, and elders and women, unfamiliar with legal proceedings, were shaken by the summonses they received. The community was in crisis.

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The residents, however, persisted. They join their resources, seeking voluntary contributions and soliciting support from government officials, private individuals, and institutions. They expanded their networks, sought legal knowledge, and relied on prayers. Yet, the struggle intensified when some community members were persuaded by the company's promises of financial gains, and others, fearing imprisonment, withdrew their opposition in exchange for case dismissals.

At last, the efforts of the people paid off when they defended their community against the unjust claims of the company.



Beauties of Palina, worth fighting for

All the cases were closed in 2014 but the pain and the impact of these circumstances are still fresh in the memories of the elders. This motivated them to secure and protect their land for the next generation through the declaration of their land as a mining-free zone.

It is taking them a lot of processes to reach this goal, but they are remaining strong in lobbying their advocacy to protect what belongs to them. For now, they are requesting a resolution to the Office of the Congressman to file a bill declaring the Municipality of Kibungan as a mining-free zone and lobbying for its passage. This made them organized the Palina Indigenous People Community Association (PIPICA).



Mountains and rice fields stand as timeless treasures

Now the challenge is for the youth of barangay Palina to be responsible and courageous to continue the next steps. Good thing that the Palina Indigenous Youth Association was organized that support the advocacy of the PIPICA and aims to continue their work as second liners. With these initiatives, it is good that they know the struggles of the elders for them to appreciate and come up with an intensified advocacy for protecting their homeland. //

## Journey on Recovering Watershed

-Jenilyn Pag-gui-

### Story of the Past

“Water is the lifeblood of every living thing in the world.”

In the 1980s, Rita Domingo, a farmer and a mother, hears the loud sound of the gushing water from the streams, waterfalls, and rivers. As I was talking with her, she remembers the prosperity of water in her community Barangay Aduyongan.

“The rice fields of the villagers were reliant on the mountain water. It irrigated the terraced paddies of the community. The people in the Barangay traditionally practiced rice-fish culture,” said Domingo. She also remembers that the Barangay was rich in native golden snails. The community was often visited by people coming from the neighboring Barangays and municipalities because of the rice-fish culture which was a good food source. Indeed, the community was food secure because water was abundant which gave them life. Life of people in the community was at the fullest. “Food was enough, water was safe and clean, and people were in good health,” she added. Thus, people were contented and happy with the simple life they had.

### Water Crisis and its Effects

Then came the 1990s earthquake that changed everything. The sound life of the people in the community was shattered. Domingo recalls that the rice fields dried up because of the insufficient water supply leading to an inadequate supply of rice. People were forced to look for other sources of income to support the needs of their families. Women went to other municipalities to work in corn fields. Some families migrated to other areas because of the scarcity of water.

“Life became difficult for us. There were moments when we struggled to produce food. Women sought water at the creeks to wash clothes, bathe our kids, and fetch water,” Domingo shared. Rice fish culture was no longer practiced because fields and ponds were destroyed by pests and worms. Villagers were thirsty. They, at that time, struggled to find water sources.



Mapping of the two watersheds: Odiat and Angattu

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Clearing of boundaries

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), water covers 70% of our planet. However, freshwater used for bathing, drinking, and irrigating our farm fields is dependent on rain and reservoirs. Only 3% of the world's water is fresh water and two-thirds of that is stocked away in frozen glaciers or otherwise unavailable for our use. The WWF also mentioned that around 1.1 billion people lack access to water. A total of 2.7 billion experience water scarcity for at least one month each year. Many of the water systems that keep ecosystems thriving and feed a growing human population are slowly depleted. The WWF further researched that rivers, lakes, and aquifers are drying up or becoming too polluted to use. More than half of the wetlands have disappeared. Further, agriculture consumes more water than any other source and wastes much of that through insufficiencies. The effects of climate change are altering the patterns of weather and water worldwide, causing water shortages and droughts. It is expected that this situation will only get worse by 2025, two-thirds of the world's population may face water shortages and ecosystems will suffer even more.

### Localized Scenario

Residents of Barangay Aduyongan are worried day by day as the situation gets worse. They are afraid of the situation of the next generation without water. Whenever government agencies or non-government organizations conduct assessments on the situation of the Barangay, the most prevailing problem is the scarcity of water. Women are the most affected because they consume most of the water in a day for drinking, cooking, washing, sanitation, and hygiene. They are responsible for finding water for their families to survive. They ensure that there is safe water at home. Domingo is one of the women in the Barangay that clamors to the problem of water. She and other women seek the generosity of IGOROTA Foundation, Inc. to help them develop their watershed. One of the Programs of IGOROTA is the ancestral domain which aims to sustain the resources of the ancestral domain through Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) in development work. Also, they encourage people to respect and exercise their Indigenous People's rights and strengthen communities' resilience to climate change by increasing their capacity.

### Community Collaborative Effort

The women, Barangay Leaders, and other community members decided to develop their watershed because they want the next generation to live with a good water resource. Their Barangay Captain, Hon. Jose Balajo said, "It is our great responsibility to pass on such natural resources to the next generation for them to enjoy the beauty, essence, and natural taste of water. The best gift or inheritance (*ipfanuh*) we could give is sufficient water for all."

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The community members initiated talks with the land owners of the three Watersheds areas. A series of negotiations were conducted; however, only the Odiat watershed landowners responded positively. Twenty-five landowners waived their rights over their land by signing the affidavit of quitclaim and waiver of rights form. This is a manifestation that the community was positive in the watershed delineation.

The watershed development project was completed through the joint collaborative effort of the community led by the members of the Amaphochon Women's Organization. The Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) was supportive all the way. All sectors were involved in the project - the youths, women, seniors, farmers, and landowners. A mapping of the Odiat Watershed took place to locate the reference points of the installation of monuments. Afterward, the women, including the seniors, and some of the Barangay Leaders participated in the clearing of the trail for the installation of the monuments. A total of 16 monuments were installed and two signages were placed in the watershed.

During the monitoring of the watershed, the Barangay Officials said that a farmer in the upper portion of the watershed made it as a pasture land and they are worried that it will destroy the area. They suggested fencing the watershed area to protect it. It was agreed in one of the meetings that barbwire is the appropriate material to be used for the fencing and pipes would serve as posts.



Watershed fencing

The fencing will secure the watershed for a period of time. The Amaphochon Women's Organization contributed an amount of P5,000.00 to purchase food and snacks to use for the fencing activity. Also, the BLGU will shoulder the labor fee of the workers. The Barangay Captain of Ayangan and his 5 companions had a short meeting with the barangay Officials of Aduyongan regarding the fencing activity. Both parties agreed on the fencing activity where the boundaries will not be affected. Clearing of the sites was done again by the volunteers: women, seniors, youth, and community leaders.

Finally, the day of fencing came. It was a shiny daylight and all the individuals packed and ready to go to the site. A total of 900 meters of barbwires were installed in the boundaries of the watershed. Indeed, in unity there is strength, in strength there is success, and in success, there is development.



This project brings people together to work towards a common goal - developing their watershed. Domingo and other members of Amaphochon Women's Organization mark on their faces the joy of enlightenment. She said, "All mothers actively participated in the watershed activities, Barangay Officials worked voluntarily and this project was owned by the community for the community. I felt the community spirit, the sense of belonging, and shared values within the community."



Making and installation of muhons

The community is targeting the watershed to become an eco-tourism park in the future. A sustainability planning was conducted to identify activities/ strategies that will develop, manage, and regenerate the uses of all the natural resources existing in the watershed. Women, leaders, and elders were invited to attend the activity. During the sustainability planning, they were able to formulate their vision of their watershed that envisions, "A developed community surrounded by a sustained forest that has a safe and clean sufficient water for potable, domestic needs and agricultural activities." They also identified activities that will improve the watershed like tree planting and formulation of ordinances to protect the watershed area. Further, the Barangay Council included watershed activities in their Annual Investment Plan last year.

After the watershed activities, Hon. Balajo visited the Office of Board Member Hon. Rolando Addug requesting indigenous tree seedlings to be planted in the watershed area. Fortunately, the request was granted. Again, the active Barangay captain visited the Office of Board member Hon. Joseph Udan requesting additional indigenous tree seedlings to be planted again in the watershed area. There were about 1,000 indigenous tree seedlings given to the Barangay. During the tree planting, BFP, PNP personnel, High school students, youth, community members, and Hon. Udan and his staff members participated in the activity. This is a manifestation of the community values that strengthen their relationship.

To date, there is a growing hope for Rita and the other women to build a brighter future for the next generation through watershed development.//

## Addressing the Surge in Teenage Suicide Cases: A Call for Action

-Jerome Mombael-

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 726,000 people take their own lives every year, with many more attempting suicides. Each suicide is a tragedy that impacts families, communities, and entire nations, leaving lasting effects on those left behind. Suicide is a global issue affecting all regions and was the third leading cause of death among 15 to 29 years old globally in 2021.



In the Philippines, the suicide rate was approximately 2.2 deaths per 100,000 people in 2019. The rate nearly doubled during the global pandemic from 2020 to 2024. The Youth Suicide Prevention Act of 2022, Senate Bill No. 1669, aims to expand early intervention and prevention efforts for youth suicide.

For children and teens, suicide is the second leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 24. The reasons for youth suicide can be categorized into four types: individual-focused, concern for others, social instability, and belief in inevitable social problems.

Suicide is not limited to high-income countries but is a global phenomenon. In fact, data reveals that nearly three-quarters (73%) of global suicides occurred in low and middle-income countries in the same year. Addressing this serious public health issue requires a comprehensive and multisectoral approach.

Research shows that more than 720,000 people die by suicide annually. The reasons are complex, involving social, cultural, biological, psychological, and environmental factors throughout a person's life. For every suicide, there are many more attempts. A prior suicide attempt is a significant risk factor for future suicides.

In my municipality, the rise in youth suicides from ages 15 and up has been alarming and heartbreaking. This is a new and troubling experience for our community. According to the Municipal Health Office, from 2022 to 2024, there were reported suicides and attempts, with some cases tragically unreported. In three cases, three high school students aged 15-17 died by strangulation. Despite efforts to investigate, no clear evidence or leads have been found to explain their actions. There were no notes, no signs of depression, and no prior indications of their distress from their families or friends.

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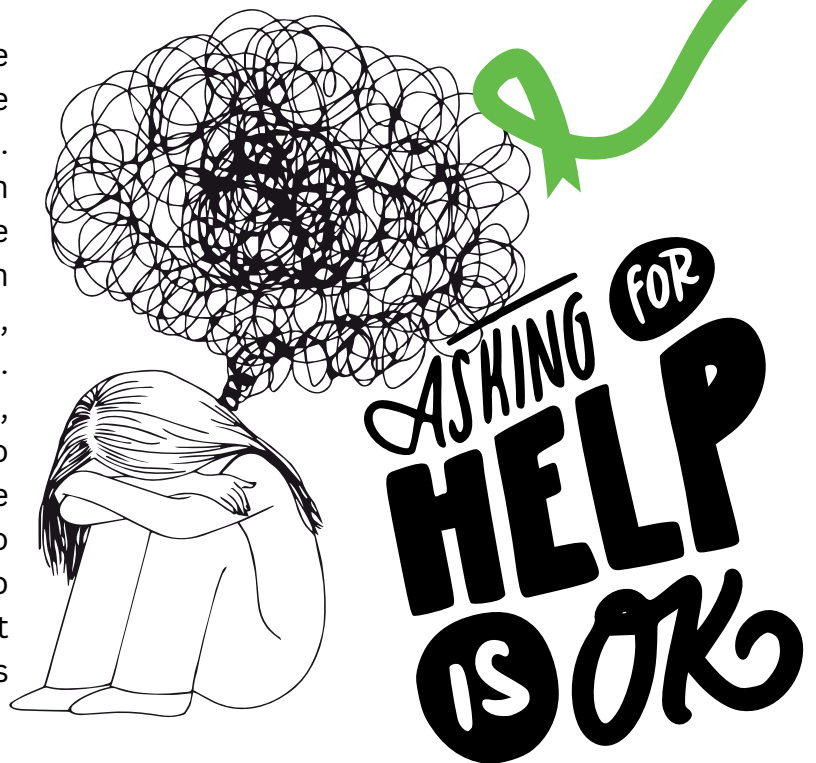
In response, local officials and legislators convened an urgent meeting to address the rising incidents of teenage suicide. They implemented various interventions, including information and education campaigns, youth dialogues, sports activities, parent-teen discussions, school psychology sessions, and moral teachings from churches.

In spite of these efforts, increasing awareness and support remains a challenge. On September 4, 2024, the community was shocked when two ambulances rushed to a scene where a youth had attempted suicide again by strangulation. Fortunately, he was seen in time by a neighbor and received medical attention. This incident was reportedly triggered by personal issues and substance abuse. This circumstance needs continuous supervision and support to help youths overcome feelings of hopelessness and despair.

The month of September is Suicide Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness about this urgent crisis. Organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration use this month to shift public perception, spread hope, and share vital information. The goal is to ensure that individuals, families, and communities have access to resources and support for suicide prevention. We don't have the right to judge those who did or attempted to do the act but my hope is that we won't let life's trials crush us or let dark moments destroy what we have built in the light.

We should embrace life with a mindset of purpose and gratitude: "Life is a goal; Lord, help me reach it. Life is a promise; Lord, help me utilize it. Life is a journey; Lord, help me complete it. Life is a duty; Lord, help me perform it. Life is a challenge; Lord, help me meet it. Life is a mystery; Lord, unfold it. Life is a battlefield; Lord, help me win it."

**"Treasure every moment that comes to you today. Gather each new glimpse of beauty that life may bring your way."//**



## Growing Strong from a Broken Home

-Anonymous-

"Not everyone is privileged to see another sunrise like you did, so before you start complaining, remember that the breath of life is never guaranteed."

Growing up is a privilege, something not granted to everyone. Some close their eyes just after being brought into this world, while others never even have the chance to emerge from their mother's womb.



My mother's strength, raising nine children on her own despite having a selfish husband, taught me the true meaning of selfless love. Even in the face of hardship, she never lost hope.

"I love you, mom."

As a grown-up, I now understand what true privilege means. This is not according to economic status but rather, it is all about how happy, loving, and caring your family is.

As a child, I believed that being privileged meant having a wealthy family. I thought of them as fortunate because they seemed to live comfortably, free from responsibilities, enjoying life without worries.

Looking back, I grew up in an environment that was emotionally cold and unhealthy. My mother was selfless, always taking care of us, and sacrificing her own needs to keep us together. My father, however, seemed to carry none of the weight of raising a family. His role was limited to providing necessities—food and shelter—but not a home. This created a sense of helplessness in me and shaped my view of men. I saw them as cowardly, weak, and selfish. In my eyes, a real man should uplift the femininity in women, not force them into roles they should not have to bear. Women should move according to their skills and abilities. Men should fulfill their responsibilities—like doing household chores, helping raise their children, and, most importantly, never abusing their wives.

I admit that my parents have their flaws. Often, they shape the way we behave, because we grow up watching and learning from them. But I have also realized that the mistakes of parents should be corrected and not be repeated. From that, I promised myself to break the cycle of this unhealthy family relationships and chose to do the right things.

To my fellow youth, no matter what family situation you are experiencing or have experienced, use it as motivation. It is not a reason to complain and take our lives.

Do not let it define or limit you. Stay positive and take control. We still have a lot of things to change in the future.

Padayon.//



## Mayoyao Awaits: Find the Perfect Experience for Your Adventure

-Rosemarie Bubod-

Mayoyao is a paradise-like municipality in Ifugao. It is blessed with mountains, valleys, and waterfalls with fresh and clean air that makes the place more enticing.

It welcomes everyone. To add, you can actually touch the clouds!

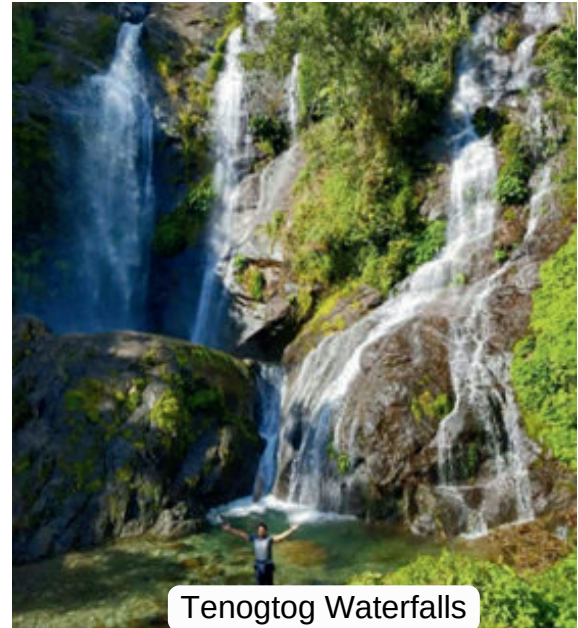
One of the amazing experiences in Mayoyao is when clouds descend so low that you can reach out and touch them.

Visitors often describe it as a very inviting destination. Rivera, a tourist, shared that “Mayoyao is a beautiful place that brings a sense of calm and peace.”

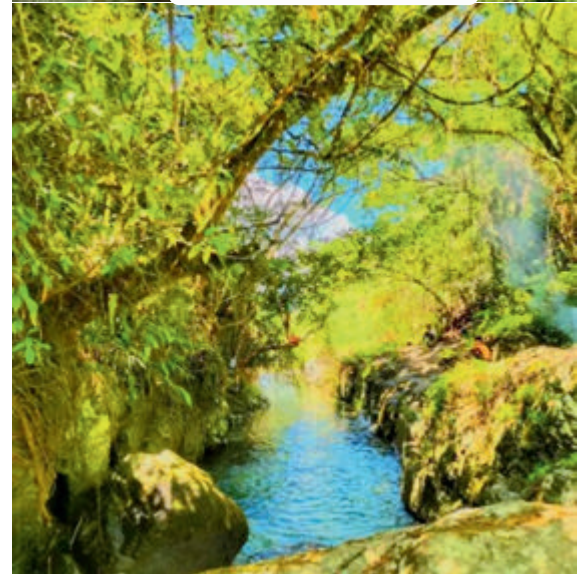
It has several attractions, each offering a unique experience. The *Tenogtog* Falls, a well-known destination in Maga welcomes travelers with its refreshing spray. An entrance fee of Php25.00 per person and Php60.00 for a cottage grant access to this scenic site. Moreover, the *Afhaw mahenchang* Falls, located in Chumang, part of Khohang, provides a serene escape, with an entrance fee of Php20.00 per person. Also, the *Mun-alajah* Falls, situated in Liwo currently offers free access, allowing visitors to fully immerse themselves in its natural splendor. However, fees indicated

One respected elder of the community shares his knowledge of the falls, emphasizing the refreshing coolness, especially during the months of September to January. He recommends a soak in the falls during the summer months, offering a welcome respite from the heat. Rivera echoes this sentiment, highlighting the stress-relieving effect of the water, making it a perfect destination for a summer getaway.

Beyond the waterfalls, Mayoyao offers more.



Tenogtog Waterfalls



Mun-alajah Waterfalls

Photos grabbed at <https://rurallegendsofmayoyao.wordpress.com> and Ifugao wonders Facebook Page

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*Khohang* located in Chumang invites visitors to camp and contemplate amidst its peaceful surroundings. A Php20.00 entrance fee grants access to this tranquil haven. Further, *Or-olong* situated also in Chumang provides stunning views of houses and mountains from its elevated vantage point. Likewise, a Php20.00 entrance fee allows visitors to enjoy this breathtaking panorama. *Nagchajan*, a well-known tourist spot in Mayoyao captivates with its beautiful scenery which features a statue of Mr. Abalon, a fighter during the colonial period. Another landmark is the “WOW MAYOYAO” signage adding a touch of history and local pride to the landscape; Landing, located in Banhal known for its tomb and hostel also offers a glimpse into the cultural heritage of the region.

Alejandro, a renowned vlogger, speaks highly of Mayoyao, proclaiming it as one of the most beautiful places he has visited. He emphasizes the ability of the sights to help visitors forget their troubles creating an ideal environment for relaxation and rejuvenation. Take note that the fees indicated are subject to change without prior notice.

Nestled amidst breathtaking waterfalls, serene landscapes, and captivating cultural landmarks, Mayoyao provides an unforgettable experience for travelers seeking adventure, tranquility, or simply a chance to reconnect with nature. This special place, with its captivating beauty, tranquil ambiance, and plethora of wonders to explore, caters to every taste. Whether you desire relaxation, thrilling adventures, or simply the joy of immersing yourself in nature, Mayoyao has something for everyone!//



Landing-Mayoyao Hostel



A'phaw Water falls



# IGOROTA Foundation, Inc.

is a non-stock, non-profit, non-governmental social development organization established in recognition of the right and responsibility of women to fully develop their God-given potentials

## OUR VISSION

“Women’s Holistic Development for Self-sustaining Communities.”

## OUR MISSION

to empower women through transformative training, education, organizing, and advocacy

## OUR PROGRAMS

### Gender and Development Program

It aims to enable women to be aware of the socio-cultural and political conditions that affect their roles, choices, image and relationships, and to facilitate responsive actions as a result of their awareness and consciousness.

### Ancestral Domain Program

It aims to sustain the resources of our ancestral domain through the Indigenous Knowledge, Systems, and Practices in development work, the respect, and exercise by the Indigenous People of their rights and strengthen communities’ resilience to climate change by increasing their capacities and mainstreaming IKSPs in disaster risk reduction and management, and resiliency program.

### Sustainable Agriculture Program

It aims to sustain our people’s existing indigenous practices of farming and land use towards well-being, sustainable development, and food sovereignty.

### Social Enterprise Program

It aims to address the practical gender needs of women and provide opportunities for women’s livelihood activities towards sustainability.

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*Realize our Vision of Women's  
Holistic Development for  
Self-sustaining Communities.*

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