

Indigenous People's Education: Mindanao, the Philippines

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The *Bukid'non Pulangiyan* tribal community lives on the watershed of Sitio Bendum in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Mindanao. Until recently, they had no access to primary education: the nearest school was seven kilometres away at the bottom of the mountain and could only be reached by walking for two hours. Consequently, school-aged *Pulangiyan* children had very limited access to basic education, and even the education they could access was not appropriate for the *Pulangiyan* tribe.

This all changed with the establishment of the Apu Pulanguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) in Bendum. APC is a community school which has developed a culture-based curriculum for primary education, and has made education accessible not only to children living in the area but also to other villages that extend to the borders of the neighbouring province of Agusan del Sur. APC's presence makes it possible for almost 150 children from indigenous communities to attend school and benefit from all of the opportunities education brings, with the result that families and the wider community are now better able to participate in the regions socio-economic development.

With support from Oxfam, APC offers daycare classes, a complete elementary course and has an ongoing initiative to support young adults through high school, college and vocational-technical courses. It has developed a culture-based curriculum for daycare and primary education that is taught using the native language, *Binukid*. The integration of culture-based principles into the education programme provides students with the opportunity to develop life skills but also makes them aware of their rootedness in their own indigenous culture and way of life. The students are given the chance to deepen their connection with the environment and their ancestral lands. Coupled with classroom knowledge, it is hoped that these children will eventually have the capability and wisdom to lead their communities to a more stable socio-cultural and political existence in the future. This kind of integration of culture-based and mainstream education needs in the APC curriculum allows *Pulangiyan* students to confidently engage academically and attend mainstream government schools at the high school level.

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One of APC's graduates, Zarmin Garcia, finished his college degree a few years ago and is again part of the APC, only this time as a Science and Health teacher to *Pulangiyen* students. Although his family is not native to Bendum, Zarmin explains how the APC enabled him to fulfil his dream of having an education. This dream, he says, is something that he values and which he wants to share with the community that he considers home. This philosophy of giving back to the community is something that he shares with other graduates of the APC who are now back in a teaching role and this will ensure that future generations of the *Pulangiyen* tribe are able to secure their own right to education.

APC is considered one of the most successful Indigenous People's schools in the country. It has gained recognition and support from the government's Department of Education, which issued a department Memorandum Order creating the process for the recognition of Indigenous People's schools in 2004. This success in Bendum not only improved the quality of life of the *Pulangiyen* community in Bendum but has also provided a model for the promotion of culture-based education throughout the country.

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