

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE PROMOTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT LOUIS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract— Local knowledge or indigenous knowledge plays a very important role in the development local communities towards sustainable development. It is then important that these should be documented, promoted and preserved. Higher Education institutions play a very important role in the promotion and preservation of local knowledge among indigenous communities. This paper presents an exploratory study on the journey of the University of Saint Louis, a CICM Catholic institution of higher learning in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan towards local knowledge promotion and preservation. Local knowledge promotion of the university and even its founding congregation and its early missionaries are also discussed.

Keywords— *Local Knowledge, Higher Education, Catholic Institution, CICM*

INTRODUCTION

Culture is defined as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001). In its simplest term, culture is everything that exists in a society (Lawton, 2012). Hence, it is then important that culture, specifically local knowledge or indigenous knowledge, should be preserved and promoted, since these are considered as the true mirror of a certain society.

Local and indigenous knowledge' refers to the cumulative and complex bodies of knowledge, knowhow, practices and representations that are maintained and developed by peoples with extended histories of interactions with the natural environment (UNSECO, 2003). The said term may also refers to traditional ecological knowledge, ethno science, folk science, and indigenous science (Abejuela III, 2007). Local knowledge is an integral part of the development process of local communities and it helps shape and defines their very existence and provides the foundation for their beliefs and traditional practices (Fussell, 1996; Davis & Wagner, 2003; Brook & McLachlan, 2008).

The Philippines, a developing country in South East Asia, is considered as a cultural hub due to the presence of more than 17 million indigenous peoples belonging to 110 ethno-linguistic groups. With this kind of landscape, it can then be considered that the country is consists of many indigenous and local knowledge. Unfortunately, environmentally devastating socio-economic activities have brought incalculable damage to primary source of livelihood and cultural spaces of indigenous peoples. This resulting loss of their cultural identities coupled with the devastation of their environment has resulted in the serious cultural disempowerment of these communities. Indigenous communities in various geographical areas are thus among the most impoverished and marginalized sectors of

Philippine society (Rotherham, 2007; Wilder, O'meara, Monti, & Nabhan, 2016). Furthermore, as a result, documentation of local knowledge among indigenous peoples is now a problem since most of them rely on oral tradition as a way of cultural transmission, and in the long run may lead to extinction and death of local knowledge of a certain group (Poole, 2003).

With this kind of situation, documentation and promotion of local knowledge among indigenous cultural communities is needed and should be given attention. In fact, many initiatives had been implemented by government agencies to support the preservation of local knowledge such as the National Commission on Culture and the Arts, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Education, and other government agencies. Non-government agencies and organizations also took initiatives to help indigenous communities. Moreover, of all the different stakeholders, higher education institutions play a very crucial role to fully realize the goal of documenting, preserving, and promoting local knowledge (Godfrey & Parker, 2010; Tindowen, 2015).

Many studies have shown how important the role of higher education in local knowledge promotion (Thaman, 2003; Ogunniyi, 2004; Gorjestani, 2004; Tindowen, 2016). Since higher education institutions are considered knowledge generators and many of their professors and staff are considered experts, they can really come up with initiatives and programs that will promote and preserve local knowledge especially in the areas of research and development and also along innovation such as digitization of cultural resources.

METHODS

This paper presents an exploratory study on the journey of the University of Saint Louis, a CICM Catholic institution of higher learning in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan towards local knowledge promotion and preservation. It will start with how the CICM and the CICM fathers embraced local knowledge and indigenous knowledge promotion as part of their mission and how this distinctive character becomes part of the academic and missionary deeds of the university.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The CICM Apostolate towards Local Knowledge Promotion

The Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae (CICM) or Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was established in 1862 by Rev Fr. Theophile Verbist in Scheut, Anderlecht, a suburb of Brussels, Belgium. It is an international religious missionary congregation, dedicated to the Incarnate Word under the name and patronage of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The CICM charism is ad-gentes (to the nations), ad-extra (towards the outside). At the core of the CICM missionary character is a CHRIST-CENTERED SPIRITUALITY for the

mission; a missionary activity integrated into the whole pastoral work of the Church; the evangelization of cultures through quality education; a proactive stance in support for people's natural and cultural heritage; and, solidarity with the poor through the establishment of an inclusive society.

There are four CIM-RP mission priorities and projects. One of these is on Indigenous People (IP Concerns). These can be manifested in the CICM Constitutions and General Directory (2006):

Art. 3. *"The missionary goal of the Institute must inspire and motivate all our commitments, both communal and personal. Wherever we are, we share in the same corporate commitment. We are alert to new situations in the world as well as to new needs of the Churches. We regularly question ourselves about the tasks we undertake. We willingly adopt the reorientations deemed necessary."*

Art. 4. *We sincerely love and respect the people to whom we are sent. We adopt a listening attitude and try to gain a knowledge and understanding of their socio-economic, political, cultural and religious realities. Aware that the Spirit has been at work everywhere, we discern the evangelical values present in these realities. We foster attitudes which reflect these values, and cooperate with initiatives which promote them. Through dialogue, we mutually purify and strengthen our values and their expression.*

Art. 13. *Through the Incarnation, the Son of God entered into the history of the Jewish people. While sharing the life of his people, he took a prophetic stance in view of the Kingdom. His example is always before us in our efforts to integrate ourselves among the people to whom God sends us.*

CICM-Philippines is tasked to promote the apostolate to the IP. This is an integral part of the missionary commitment of the congregation. This can be seen in the programs being implemented in CICM parishes and schools. There are centers established in schools that give emphasis in the IP. CICM priests and brothers are exposed to the realities of the IP so that their in their own way, they can respond to their pressing needs.

2. The CICM Fathers and the Promotion of Local Knowledge

The CICM is considered as one of the many religious congregations around the world that took initiatives in the documentation and promotion of local knowledge. CICM missionaries are known to document cultures and languages especially in Northern Philippines. Since the arrival of first missionaries in 1907, many of them ventured into local knowledge as part of their mission (Ramos, 2018). Many of the early CICM missionaries who had to climb mountains and cross treacherous rivers in Northern Luzon engaged themselves mainly in opening schools and building churches in key areas, as well as in promoting trades and livelihood among the locals for the communities' economic wellbeing.

Among the CICM missionaries in the Philippines, Rev. Fr. Francis Hubert Lambrecht is one of the most remarkable breed

of COCM missionaries who is also known internationally because of his works on Ifugao culture. He published more than 70 original papers on Ifugao (including their language, sagas (hudhud), songs religion and rituals, world view, technology and art, and socio-political systems and institutions. Many of his field notes and manuscripts have remained to be published after his demise (1978). Rev. Fr. Morice Vanoverberg also established himself as an authority on Ilokano, Kankanay, and Isneg language and culture. His works were on grammar, lexicography (dictionary and thesaurus), folk literature, history, ethnography and cultural anthropology. His main work is on the publication of a book on the original language of the Negritos of Casiguran. Other prominent CICM missionaries whose passion is on indigenous studies and local knowledge are Rev. Fr. Francisco Billet, CICM on Kalinga Ullalim and Ifugao Orthography; Rev. Fr. Henry Geeroms, CICM on Ilokano, Ibalaoi, and Kankanaey; Rev. Fr. George Gelade, CICM on Ilokano dictionary; Rev. Fr. Alfonso Claerhoudt, CICM on Igorot songs; Rev. Fr. Jerome Moerman on Ifugao tales and songs; and Rev. Fr. Godfrey Lambrecht on Gaddang rites and religion.

3. Local Knowledge Promotion in Higher Education

It has been stressed that higher education institutions have crucial role to play in documenting and promoting local knowledge. In fact, even the Church document, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) is faithful in instilling the challenge and role of universities in the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge and even cultural heritages.

“Every Catholic university, as a university, is an academic community which, in a rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching, and various services offered to local, national and international communities.”

Ex Corde Ecclesiae, No. 12.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2006) also stressed how important the role of universities and schools in the promotion and of culture and the arts. Schools and universities should promote through instruction an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education. Moreover, schools should encourage linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, whenever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age and incorporating traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate method of communication and transmission of knowledge. It is then imperative than schools is considered as an important agent of cultural transmission (Laouira, 1999).

Many universities and colleges around the world already came up with initiatives and programs for local knowledge

promotion and preservation. Universities should collaborate with government and non-government agencies in the conduct of indigenous studies so that policy and extension programs are implemented (Selvaratnam, 1988). Indigenous knowledge should also be part of the curriculum at all levels and in all programs, where applicable (Nyamnjoh, 2004). Since universities are considers as the main producers and generators of knowledge, then, they play a powerful tool in the documentation of local knowledge and indigenous systems (Moahi, 2012).

4. Local Knowledge Promotion Initiatives of the University of Saint Louis

University of Saint Louis (USL) as a CICM school embraced the mission of the CICM on Indigenous Peoples (IP Concern). Despite its young age as an educational institution, USL is committed in its mission of becoming a university that promotes Filipino and indigenous culture and traditions through the following initiatives and programs:

5.1. Instruction

5.1.1. Curricular Programs

There are no formal programs on local knowledge and indigenous studies in the university except integration of the same in CHED-mandated general education courses in the undergraduate level such as History, Literature, and Humanities. Meanwhile, a special topic in teaching indigenous peoples is integrated in one Professional Education course in the Teacher Education program. Furthermore, pre-service teachers are also given opportunity to do service-learning programs to our Aeta brothers and sisters of Peñablanca, Cagayan. In the graduate level, USL offers Master of Arts in Teaching and Master of Arts in Education major in Social Studies with emphasis on topics on local knowledge and indigenous studies. Also, many of the graduates of the Master of Arts in Education major in Biological Studies were engaged in different ethnobiological and ethnomedicinal studies.

5.1.2. Teaching Indigenous People Program

Part of the curriculum of Teacher Education students is a course on Teaching Indigenous Peoples. Part of the p[rogram is a service learning program to Aetas students and pupils of Peñablanca, Cagayan. The SERVICE- LEARNING through the opportunity classes substantiated the learning outcomes of Teaching Indigenous People and Inclusive Education while quality and meaningful service which is shared and owned by students and their partners was extended to the community. Through intentional and focused reflection session, student engagement and responsibility; pro-social behavior and civic values; and strengthened character and values were promoted; thus, the success of the service-learning (Corpuz & Daquiaog, 2015).

5.2. Research

Research as part of the trifocal functions of USL is geared towards local knowledge and indigenous knowledge promotion and preservation. Through the establishment of the Center for Social Innovation, Local Knowledge and Educational Research

(CSILKER), USL carried its goal of becoming a university cultural hub in the Cagayan Valley Region. Part of the major research agenda of the center is on local knowledge and Cagayano Development which also includes cultural and indigenous studies, local history, Cagayano studies, and ethnobiological studies.

5.2.1. Research Publications

The university publishes the *Bannag: A Journal of Local Knowledge* annually through print and online platform. The journal is published by University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines under the management of the Center for Social Innovation, Local Knowledge and Educational Research. The journal focuses on the results of original research projects in various fields of Culture and the Arts, Indigenous Studies, Anthropology, Local History, Indigenous Politics and Governance, Music, Ethnopharmacology, and other related fields. The journal is published in the Philippines but accepts articles from authors all around the globe.

Furthermore, the university through the center also submits papers on local knowledge to different international peer reviewed and ISI/SI indexed journals. This is to ensure that promotion of local knowledge does not only limit in the local setting, but also in the different parts of the world.

5.2.2. Research Conference on Local Knowledge and Indigenous Studies

As one of a premier research center hub in the region, the University through its Social Innovation, Local Knowledge and Educational Research center initiates annual research conference on local knowledge and indigenous studies. The conference aims to gather scholars and Higher Education and Basic Education teachers who are interested in doing local knowledge and indigenous studies and researches. Specifically, it aims to update the participants on the status of indigenous education and cultural studies in the Philippines; provide opportunities for teachers and local knowledge enthusiasts to share their studies and researches on local knowledge and indigenous studies in a scholarly environment; provide an avenue for the participants to explore and discover the richness of the Cagayano culture and traditions; understand better the role of local knowledge and indigenous studies in the promotion of sustainable development; provide participants a thorough discussion on the different processes and methodologies in doing researches involving indigenous peoples and cultural communities; and, build a strong partnership and linkages among institutions, scholars and local knowledge enthusiasts in the Philippine and in the world in the promotion of local knowledge and indigenous studies as an important tool in achieving sustainable development in a multicultural world.

5.2.3. Linkages and Partnerships to Government and Non-Government Organizations

As part of its mandate of doing collaborations with various stakeholders to further promote local knowledge and indigenous studies, the university has inked partnerships and

linkages to different government and non-government organizations. Presently, the university partners with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in the conduct of three creative research grants funded by the said commissions amounting to PhP 8 million. These researches focused on documentation and promotion of cultural resources and indigenous beliefs of the Aetas of Quirino, Isabela, and Cagayan; the Ibanags of Isabela and Cagayan; and the Malauegs of Rizal, Cagayan. Meanwhile, the university is also being supported by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) for the conduct studies involving indigenous peoples and also the Department of Education (DepEd) in the conduct of local knowledge research conferences and presentations.

In addition, the university also forged partnerships with non-government organizations. USL is an active member of the Asia United Digital Resource Network (AUDRN). The Asian University Digital Resource Network (AUDRN) is an educational network of academic institutions and professional in the Philippines and other Asian countries that serves as a collaborative hub to promote the (re)discovery and use of local knowledge in higher education and expand 21st century digital and critical literacy through capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, USL is also a member of the National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples in Higher Education (NiChE). NiChE is a national organization that aims to promote diversity and culture among indigenous peoples. Currently, USL is the Luzon Cluster Head of the said organization. Finally, USL also forged partnership with the International Multicultural Network (IMN) – Azerbaijan. The International Multicultural Network is an online presence to connect researchers and practitioners with an interest in multiculturalism. Aimed at promoting and disseminating research on the multifaceted multicultural agenda and for comprised of scholars, state and community actors specializing in the fields of multiculturalism, intercultural and interreligious relations across diverse disciplines and geographical regions. IMN was the main partner of USL in the conduct of the 1st International Research Conference on Local Knowledge and Indigenous Studies last October 24-27, 2018.

5.2.4. Documentation and Preservation of Cagayano Cultural Resources

One of the main research agenda of the university is on the preservation and promotion of Cagayano culture. Many studies had been conducted documenting different cultural resources of the Cagayan province such as dances, music, arts, indigenous systems and beliefs and language and literature. Some of these studies conducted by undergraduate and graduate students and faculty were presented in different local and international research conferences.

5.3. Extension

The university, as a CICM school, is also committed in the promotion of just and humane society through the different extension and outreach programs being catered to different communities in Cagayan and nearby provinces. Through the

Center for Social Action under the Office of the Vice President for Mission and Identity, extension and outreach activities are being catered especially to different indigenous cultural groups in the province such as the Agtas of Peñablanca, Cagayan, and as far as the different tribes in Kalinga province.

5.3.1. Outreach Programs to Indigenous Peoples in Northern Luzon

Outreach programs are being offered by all departments of the university to cater to indigenous cultural groups in Cagayan such as the Agtas of Peñablanca, Cagayan. Literacy programs are being provided by the Teacher Education and Liberal arts group while medical and dental mission is also being conducted by the Health and Allied Sciences groups. Feeding program, gift giving activities, livelihood training programs, and other important activities are being conducted by the university.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a brief exploratory analysis of how local knowledge promotion is being integrated in University of Saint Louis, a CICM Catholic institution of higher learning. Indeed, USL upholds to the challenge posed by the present times in terms of helping indigenous communities in promoting and preserving their local knowledge. Inspired by the mission and passion of the early CICM missionaries, the university continues to commit itself towards the realization of becoming a cultural hub in the Cagayan Valley Region through the inclusion of local knowledge promotion in its trifocal functions: instruction, research, and extension.

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