









The Heroic Business of Saving Ilocos Sur's Cultural Heritage

llocos Sur Loom Weavers Association (ISLA)

A mother who learned loom weaving before the age of 12 tried to save this tradition from vanishing. As her reward, she ended up having it as the core of a thriving business.

THE INTRICATE PROCESS OF ABEL WEAVING

- 1. It starts with starching or dying the thread.
- 2. Spooling the thread into bamboo spools follows.
- 3. Next is warping to combine the colors of thread according to the guide of the pattern, and beaming or putting the threads into the wooden loom frame.
- Actual weaving depends on the type of handloom to be used—headling, reeding, or weft winding.

omfiled at the prospect of losing an industry that she grew up with, Agustina Quitoriano tried to salvage every discarded loom she could find.

The looms were once popular for weaving cutton yerrs into abel fabric—the pride and loonic symbol of flocos. Sur since the Galleon Trade, when the quality and designs of its products almost spun Spain's own weaving industry out of existence.

The floceno weavers then were using the Gossyphun barbadense, the extra-long staple and the finest cotton variety similar to that in the United States. Gossyphun barbadense accounts for only eight percent of the total global cotton production.

However, the time came when the skilled labor for traditional weaving dwindled, leaving only a few in Vigan to carry on this centuries old industry.

Moreover, the local supply of cotton yam could not be depended upon. The Philippines has been a net importer of cotton since 1960, with imports rising by as much as 63.89 percent in 2014.

Undaunted, Agustina started with the two wooden looms that she had found, but she had to deal with a lack of space. "[The loom] is a big contraption. Where would I put these looms?"

Unfortunately, she lacked, not only space, but also the money for the raw materials and the compensation for the people to run the looms.

By stroke of serendipity came the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) reaching out to her with every trick in the book to make her business hit the ground running.

"[DTI] even helped us by recommending financial institutions."

In no time at all, Agustina's business got off to a good start and grew through the years as she attended one DTI training seminar after another. The DTI's marketing division has also contributed a lot in making the abeliablic become a must-have souvenir item of the province.

The abelifabrics are customarily sold at the Vigan public market and by the shops along Crisologo Street where local and foreign tourists buy souvenir items.



Today, Agustina has 32 women employed. Some are based in the production house, and the others work in their respective homes.

"If [the mothers] have extra room for the loom, then they can do it at home," she says. "They can put the looms in their houses and take breaks to cook, dean, and take care of their children," Agustina explains.

Agustina has also partnered with the Department of Labor and Employment for its special program for the employment of students. The program has enabled her to hire high school students during their summer vecation, making them earn income while learning the creft.

"My husband did not make a lot and we just wanted our children to have a good future. That was how I started. I wanted to get into weaving because I've known it all my life," Agustina recalls.

True enough, all of her five children have finished school as she weaved her way to success, but it was not all that she has accomplished. She has guided others along the same path while helping save an industry and a cultural heritage.



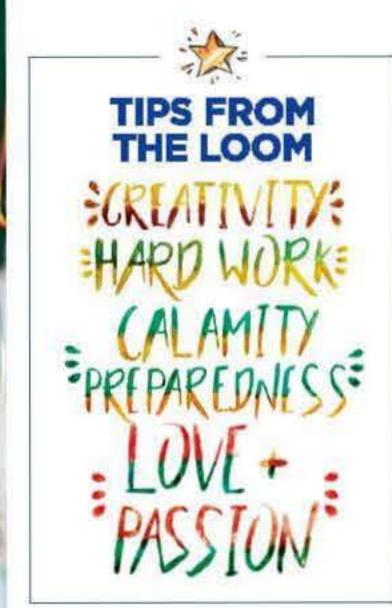
DED YOU KNOW?

During the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, the Manila Galleons sailed the Pacific with inabel sailcloth woven by Ilonanas.



THE ILOCANA LOON WEAVERS

These women are all smiles as they go about the intricate process of loom weaving. Weavers must master synchronizing the movements of their hands and feet to properly use the wooden handloom. They make sure that the tradition of abel weaving is passed on for future generations by teaching and honing the young ones to love this beautiful and creative craft.



HOW DTI HELPED

Under DTI's Shared Service
Facilities (SSF) project, Agustina was
able to get financial assistance and to avail
trainings and seminars for product design
development and business management.

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