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**Furthering International Relations Capacities and Intercultural Engagement to  
Nurture Campus Diversity and to Support Internationalization at Home (FRIENDS)**

*in partnership with the Saint Louis University's*

**University Research & innovation Center  
School of Accountancy, Management, Computing & Information Studies  
Community Extension and Outreach Programs Office**

*together with*

**Kape ti Uma, Inc.  
Farm to Cup Benguet  
Wyldwood Coffee Project  
The Strada Club of the Philippines, Baguio CAR-Chapter**

**“COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ENGAGEMENT”  
with Purok Domolpos, Tinongdan, Itogon, Benguet  
October 15, 2022, Friday; whole day**

**MINUTES of the ENGAGEMENT**

The day started with a meet-up at Jollibee Upper Session Road Extension at exactly 4:00 am. We set out at around 4:30 am with the world still dark. Along the way, we stopped at a breakfast nook, then afterward, off we went. The destination is a 5-hr ride from Baguio, traversing cemented and eventually split to a rough road for 21 kilometers, where the streets are almost close to a ravine, with no fence to protect from the risk of falling. The place is an isolated community, far from the National road; reaching the site is quite an effort. The site sits around Mt. Ugo, where climbers set foot.



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From the time we got off our vehicles, we were met by cows along the road and street dogs. We had to walk downhill, passing by greeneries and coffee trees and wood houses with the mountains as the backdrop, to a spot identified as the usual meeting area of the community. There we met the residents who welcomed us. They brought homemade coffee, fresh bananas, and passion fruits for us. While eating, we had some small talks about their way of life, how they survive, and their everyday life. At the same time, we proceeded to hand out some bags, paper, pencils, and snacks to the 20 (twenty) elementary school students in the community. The sponsor of the giveaways is one of the partners of the FRIENDS project in this community engagement – LAP (Lapis at Papel).

Afterward, the residents proceeded to butcher a domesticated pig. This ritual feast of killing a 'clean' pig is done to pray for a good life and to shoo off harmful elements. While the pig was being killed, an elder prayed during the butchering process. Then the pig was cooked, known as 'watwat,' a famous cuisine amongst Cordillerans. Watwat is commonly described as a slice/slices of boiled pork that is distributed or shared as part of the meal of an Igorot feast. Watwat must also be cooked under firewood using 'silias' or heavy metal pots.

While one group was cooking, we invited the rest for intercultural dialogue at their meeting hall. We asked them to narrate how they were known by the public, considering their solitary existence. They said they were exposed to the public eye due to a Philippine Air Lines plane crash on June 26, 1987. The plane's wreckage was discovered at Mount Ugu, a 2,086-meter-high (6,844 ft) mountain between Itogon, Benguet, and Kayapa, Nueva Vizcaya. The plane crash site was located around 180 meters below Mount Ugu. Sitio Domolpos is found near the area. Afterward, though much delayed, things improved a bit with the provision of electricity in 2017. But to date, access to telecommunication is accessible only if you go up mountains.

According to them, many of the forefathers did not get to have a chance to have formal schooling. Some went to Dalupirip, Itogon (a progressive community), to seek formal education. The elementary school was established only in 1962. At this time, most would only get married to those in the community. Nobody would get out to find partners outside of the area. Their religion used to be animism; hence, they were called pagans. But Mr. Roy, one of the elders, said forefathers knew better about God. However, he admitted that because of paganism, the tribe would believe in killing pigs in the hope that they would get what they wished for. One of the beliefs mentioned is that "one has to take a bath to be baptized, and when one dies, s/he has to be bathed to be blessed."

Elders lead Sitio/Village Domolpos from the Iwak tribe. Iwak is a small ethnic group (see [https://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/12295/RP](https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12295/RP)). One elder said, "They usually don't depend on doctors to treat sickness, as forefathers have taught. Like when a mother gives birth, this is usually a natural birthing without the aid of any medicine." This conversation on cultural practices led to concern about their culture becoming forgotten because of the evolution of things. Even their specific dialect is becoming extinct and is now being replaced by the dominant language- Ibaloi.



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The current population is supposed to be almost 600, but many are found all over the nearby advanced communities. The physically present settlers are only 274. “Life is complicated,” cited by them. They said they used to exist by planting sweet potatoes, but the production decreased, perhaps due to climate change. Hence they switched to coffee production and, at times, got some blessings from mountain climbers who passed by their place en route to and fro Mt. Ugo. But many would opt to migrate to other areas to survive.

The discussion on cultural practices segued to coffee production and agri-tourism on how to develop the village's economy. Coffee planting, it seems, is found to be compatible with flora and fauna of the place because Arabica coffee thrives and the quality of the output is also of good quality. Agri tourism is also added to the picture because of the strategic location of the place for mountain climbing. Coffee with tourism is a good combination. Hence Saint Louis University's FRIENDS project, together with several of its partners, will continue to provide intervention for a long time to uplift the conditions of the Indigenous People of Domolpos, Tinongdan, with Iwak tribesmen as leaders. The commitment to a partnership is set in stone to ensure that the area's development will eventually come true.

After the dialogue, we feasted on the cooked ‘watwat’ as our main dish and the usual rice at around 1pm. We ate with bare hands. Then we had to say goodbye by almost 4pm. They gave us parting gifts such as bananas, grapefruits, passion fruits, and sayote.

We were led to a shortcut by one of them by climbing mountains and molehills to get to the main road. It was a backbreaking trek, and shortness of breath as we trudged along the footpath.

In closing, we set out at dawn with three 4x4 pick-ups as our transportation at around 4 am and returned to Baguio at almost close to 9 pm with hearts full of gratitude for what had been.

Written by:

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