

Agenda 6  
BEST PRACTICES :  
ON REENERGIZING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH SCHOOLS FOR LIVING TRADITION  
A GUARANTEE FOR MINORITY WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN  
ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

1. The **Lumah Ma Dilaut** is grassroot-based organizations in the Philippines that believes that community empowerment must be inseparably linked to strengthening its knowledge system - the very foundation of society. Through alternative learning system or **Schools of Living Tradition**, it ensures that indigenous knowledge and traditional wisdom of Sama ethnic and Muslim minority community is handed down from generation to generation. For instance, mother-to-daughter transfer of skills happen in a culture-bound and values-based curriculum designed for life-long learning.
2. Since 2005, in the Philippines, concerted efforts of education rights advocates and civil society network working on educational reforms have been supporting Alternative learning system (ALS) and schools for living traditions as strategies in the campaign for Education for All (EFA) and the Millenium Development Goals.
3. In response, Philippine government has legislated important laws and implemented programs to insitutionalize the ALS. The Department of Education has since upgraded the 'Non-Formal Education' program and created a Bureau of Alternative Learning System. DEPED now also recognizes indigenous people's schools and support programs for strengthening grassroot-operated Schools for Living Tradition through the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA).
4. Indeed, tradition and culture are important ingredients of diversity.
5. Thus, it is with regret that we noted that while General Recommendation 30 talks about measures to eliminate harmful traditional and cultural practices, it is silent about preserving positive and life-affirming values.
6. Culture and traditions too have their own positive histories, although those of women were unfortunately writen-off, silenced and coopted by dominant structures and patriarchy.
7. In SEA there is a matrilineal matriarchal society of **Minangkabaw** in Sumatra; the Bugis of Sulawesi and Kalimantan has traditions of **bissu** and feminine priestesses; in the Philippines, Mindanawon Moro, Lumad and Visayan traditions revered the **Baylan, Pandita** and **Panday**. All across the archipelago, to these days,

women spiritual leaders continue to lead in worship rituals although forced into the shadows and banned from public practice by mainstream and institutional religions, their spirituality sadly vanished as works of superstition and sometimes branded as religious deviance.

8. Sama Dilaut belongs to the animistic and shamanic traditions of Sulu, Sulawesi and Borneo where mostly female shamans, healers, geomancers and ritual leaders continue to function in important life-cycle and fertility rituals maintaining metaphysical balance in birth-death-and-rebirth. Meanwhile, in Muslim societies, there are mystics and sufis whose spirituality is centered on Love of the Divine Feminine and many of whose venerated saints, women among them, remain to be inspirations of even Royal dynastic authorities in Java, for instance. Even mainstream Muslims who uphold the hadith or prophetic sayings as important cornerstone of Shari'a, believe Prophet to have said that 'paradise is at the foot of the mother' while Qur'an emphasizes on God's mercy and compassion as balanced with Her graciousness and benevolence as of a '**Ruhum**' or womb that nurtures and propagates.
9. At the learning centers and Schools for Living Traditions, we celebrate these beliefs and practices and ensure that they are being transferred from generation to generation. It has been inspiring that women and girls have been the most enthusiastic participants as learners and cultural leaders, affirming that before the introduction of new and modern learning systems, women were at the center of communal and traditional life as producers of knowledge and holders of culture.
10. The international community, the United Nations system, State and government institutions and civil society believing in intercivilizational dialogue and inter-religious harmony, and advocating plurality and diversity could not do any less, more than ever it must increase and sustain efforts to contribute in helping build the capacity of ethnic and religious minority women for them to reclaim their centrality and lead in reenergizing their communities' traditional wisdom and knowledge systems.
11. Thank you and peace be upon us all.

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