

Economic Impact of Meranaw Weaving Crafts on Livelihood and the Local Economy of Lanao Del Sur

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Abstract: This study examines the complex economic and social contributions of traditional Meranaw weaving crafts, specifically weaving, to the communities in Lanao, Philippines. It investigates how this heritage craft, characterized by the intricate okir motifs, serves as a crucial engine for economic resilience, particularly in post-conflict recovery. Drawing on interviews with key artisans and leaders of weaving associations, the research provides a qualitative analysis of the craft's impact on household income, employment generation, and business growth. Findings reveal that weaving provides a significant, and often primary, source of household income, offering financial stability that complements or surpasses traditional livelihoods like agriculture. The research also underscores the role of weaving in fostering community and economic resilience, particularly following the 2017 Marawi siege. It demonstrates how these craft-based ventures have provided a vital lifeline for internally displaced persons (IDPs), enabling them to rebuild their lives and achieve self-sufficiency. While recognizing these positive impacts, the study also addresses challenges such as competition from mass-produced goods, the need for continued support and training for new generations of weavers, and the physical demands of the craft. Ultimately, this article argues that Meranaw traditional weaving is more than a cultural practice; it is a powerful tool for economic empowerment, social rehabilitation, and the preservation of a rich cultural legacy.

Keywords: Meranaw Weaving, cultural capital, heritage preservation, social reproduction, economic empowerment, Local Economy.

1. Introduction

The weaving crafts of the Meranaw people, characterized by intricate okir motifs and rich cultural symbolism, transcend their role as mere artistic expressions and stand as vital contributors to the local economy of Lanao del Sur. These traditional crafts, particularly the malong and the langkit, are deeply embedded in the community's identity and social fabric, providing not only cultural pride but also tangible economic benefits. As a livelihood activity, weaving generates household income and sustains families, with women playing a central role in production and transmission of skills. The practice has evolved into a cornerstone of economic resilience, offering sustainable employment opportunities and supporting small-scale enterprises.

The economic significance of Meranaw weaving extends

beyond household sustenance. Local businesses thrive through the trade of woven products, while market expansion has introduced these crafts to national and even global platforms. This has fostered entrepreneurial ventures, from micro-enterprises to cooperatives, which further stimulate business growth within the province. Importantly, weaving contributes to post-conflict recovery by empowering communities, fostering self-reliance, and creating shared spaces for cultural and economic revival.

The integration of cultural preservation with economic development positions weaving as both a heritage practice and a driver of progress. It demonstrates that traditional crafts are not static relics of the past but dynamic forces that shape the future of Meranaw communities. By reinforcing household incomes, generating employment, and stimulating business activities, weaving crafts directly fuel the economic vitality of Lanao del Sur. Thus, the sustained preservation and promotion of Meranaw weaving not only safeguard cultural heritage but also ensure long-term economic sustainability, underscoring the inseparable relationship between tradition and development.

2. Framework

This study examines the socioeconomic significance of Meranaw traditional handicrafts in Lanao del Sur through the analytical lens of cultural capital theory. By drawing on established theoretical perspectives, the study seeks to explore how the cultural knowledge, skills, and symbolic value embedded in these handicrafts function as forms of capital that influence social reproduction, economic opportunities, and the preservation of social identity. The first theoretical foundation is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and social reproduction (1986). Bourdieu argues that cultural capital—embodied in knowledge, skills, and dispositions—is unequally distributed in society and can provide distinct advantages in education, employment, and upward mobility. In the Meranaw context, mastery of traditional handicrafts, such as weaving the malong or crafting intricate langkit strips, constitutes a form of embodied cultural capital. These skills, learned through immersive cultural practice and intergenerational transmission, not only hold artistic value but also reinforce cultural

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continuity.

The persistence of such craft traditions facilitates social reproduction, ensuring that artisanal expertise and its associated prestige are preserved and passed on within Meranaw communities. The second perspective draws from A.H. Halsey *et al.*'s (1997) articulation of cultural capital as a driver of economic opportunity. Cultural capital, when recognized and valued in certain markets, can be transformed into financial capital. In the case of Lanao del Sur, the production and commercialization of traditional handicrafts serve as viable sources of livelihood for artisans and their families. These crafts—admired for their cultural authenticity and artistry—can be marketed locally, nationally, and internationally. Furthermore, cultural tourism initiatives, heritage fairs, and craft exhibitions provide platforms for these products to reach wider audiences. Such opportunities not only generate income but also stimulate local economic development, linking cultural preservation with community resilience. Mastery of these crafts strengthens connections to ancestral knowledge, reinforcing a sense of belonging and continuity.

Recognition and appreciation of Meranaw craftsmanship by broader Philippine society and global audiences can further enhance the community's cultural standing, empowering artisans as cultural bearers and ambassadors of Meranaw heritage. By synthesizing these three theoretical strands—social reproduction (Bourdieu), economic opportunity (Halsey *et al.*), and identity formation (Yosso)—this study advances a holistic framework for understanding the multifaceted significance of Meranaw traditional handicrafts. These crafts are not only economic commodities but also cultural legacies and markers of social prestige. Through this lens, the research will investigate how traditional artistry contributes to sustaining livelihoods, transmitting heritage, and shaping the social fabric of Meranaw communities in Lanao del Sur.

3. Economic Impact of Meranaw Crafts on Income, Employment, and Business Growth

The age-old tradition of Meranaw weaving transcends mere artistry. These handcrafted textiles, adorned with the iconic *okir* motifs and steeped in cultural symbolism, form a vital pillar of Lanao's economy. Beyond their aesthetic and cultural value, these weavings make a significant contribution to the region's financial well-being by generating income, fostering employment, and promoting the growth of local businesses. This exploration will delve deeper into these economic impacts, highlighting how this heritage craft fuels livelihoods and bolsters the community's economic fabric while simultaneously safeguarding a rich cultural legacy.

A. Weaving as a Source of Household Income

Weaving has long been a vital source of income for Meranaw communities, particularly for women. In regions where agriculture is the primary livelihood or occupation, income from farming is often seasonal and unpredictable, making it challenging for families to achieve financial stability throughout the year. Weaving, therefore, emerges as a crucial supplementary livelihood, providing a steady and reliable

stream of income that can help buffer families against the uncertainties of agricultural earnings (Cortez, n.d.). This economic role is particularly significant in the context of the Meranaw, whose weaving traditions are deeply embedded in their cultural identity and social fabric.

The Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association exemplifies how organized weaving initiatives can transform the economic landscape for Meranaw women. By standardizing pricing and securing bulk orders, the association ensures that members receive immediate payment for their products, thus offering a level of financial predictability that is rare in subsistence farming (Cortez, n.d.). Weaving as a source of household income plays a significant role in many family economies, especially in regions with a rich tradition of textile production. This productivity is attributed to the transfer of knowledge and skills across generations, which sustains and improves the business over time. However, despite these economic gains, the benefits within the household are not always equitably distributed. Women's participation in weaving can provide a sense of ownership and contribute to household income.

Additionally, younger generations, particularly women, sometimes seek education and employment outside weaving, which may impact the future sustainability of the craft as a household income source. Home-based weaving offers flexibility, allowing women to balance domestic duties while contributing to the economy. Overall, weaving remains a vital income source for many households, combining cultural heritage with economic survival, but challenges remain in ensuring equitable benefits and sustaining participation across generations, as Mabaning said...

"For as long as I can remember, weaving has provided my livelihood. Without a husband or children of my own, my nieces and nephews, whose parents struggle with school fees, have become my responsibility. I've lost count of how many I've supported through their education. This weaving is my sole income, and I even provided the dowry for one of my nephews."

Weaving can indeed serve as a household income, especially in contexts where crafts and artisanal skills are valued and market demand exists. The experience highlights how weaving is not just a source of personal livelihood, but also a means of supporting an extended family, an everyday reality in many communities around the world. The fact that they have been able to consistently fund education for your nieces and nephews and even provide a dowry demonstrates that the income generated from weaving is substantial enough to cover significant expenses beyond basic living costs. This suggests that the craft is not merely a hobby or occasional side job but a reliable and essential economic activity that sustains your household and supports others financially. In many societies, such artisanal work forms the backbone of informal economies and can be the primary source of income for entire families. The key factors that determine whether weaving can be a stable household income include the quality of the products, access to markets, pricing, and the ability to scale production or diversify offerings. Your commitment and success indicate that weaving

has become a viable and meaningful economic foundation, capable of meeting both your needs and those of your extended family. Additionally, Bae Palao also stated that...

"Weaving has been my sole means of supporting my children. I always tell them, 'My children, I will ensure you all receive an education, but please do not be envious of others.' Two of my children have graduated from MSU, another from LCCI, a private school, and the youngest is in high school. Our daily necessities are also met through this craft. This is why this type of work is so important for women; even while staying home, they can still earn a living."

The statement highlights empowerment through self-sufficiency, as her weaving directly provides for her family, demonstrating significant autonomy. Her commitment to education, as evidenced by her children's graduations, demonstrates a strategic investment in future mobility, prioritizing long-term uplift over immediate gratification. The emphasis on "not being envious" conveys a lesson in dignity and contentment, fostering self-worth despite circumstances. Lastly, her experience underscores the vital role of home-based industries for women, offering a flexible and essential avenue for economic contribution in the Philippines.

This narrative implicitly points to systemic gaps in formal employment and social safety nets in the Philippines, with weaving serving as a resilient response to these limitations. While empowering, "staying home" also touches upon societal expectations of women's roles, where home-based work can be both a benefit and a reflection of existing gendered labor divisions. The successful education of her children exemplifies the profound intergenerational impact of maternal investment, potentially breaking the cycle of poverty and contributing to broader societal development. Ultimately, her advocacy for her craft underscores the need for greater recognition and support for the informal sector in the Philippines, acknowledging its vital role in the national economy and the livelihoods of women.

This system not only empowers women economically but also enhances their decision-making roles within their households, as they become reliable contributors to the family's finances. Additionally, Bae Manalocon said that ...

"For your income, now, weaving can provide earnings similar to a teacher's salary. Considering a Langkit priced at 1500, and if you complete one in a week, that is a weekly income of 1500. Comparing this to your previous potential of 1000 per week (based on the 200 times 7 days calculation), you now earn an extra 100 per week. Furthermore, if you weave expensive crafts like Langkit, such as the Sukip, where each piece yields 5000, completing one in two weeks would result in an income of 10,000 over those two weeks, making your monthly salary 10,000."

The initial claim is that weaving can provide earnings similar to a teacher's salary. The examples provided, Langkit at PHP 1,500 per week and Sukip at PHP 5,000 per two weeks, are used

to support this assertion. The analysis directly compares these weaving incomes to a "previous potential" of PHP 1000 per week, highlighting an increase of PHP 100 per week from the Langkit example. It then extrapolates the Sukip example to a monthly income of PHP 10,000. This relies on several assumptions: the weaver's consistent production of one Langkit per week or one Sukip every two weeks; the consistent pricing of Langkit at PHP 1500 and Sukip at PHP 5000; the existence of consistent market demand for these woven crafts at the stated prices; the implicit benchmark of PHP 10,000 monthly income from Sukip being comparable to a teacher's salary, without specifying a typical teacher's salary in the Philippines; and finally, the "previous potential" calculation of PHP 1000 per week based on "200 times 7 days," which lacks clear context for its origin and validity.

The broader implications and potential limitations of the claims. While it presents a seemingly attractive income potential, it glosses over crucial real-world factors. The sustainability of production is a significant concern; the ability to consistently weave one Langkit per week or one Sukip every two weeks might be physically demanding and time-consuming, without accounting for variations in skill, raw material availability, or the weaver's well-being. Market volatility and competition are also unaddressed; the income figures are fixed, assuming stable demand and no market competition. In reality, prices for crafts can fluctuate based on supply, demand, trends, and the entry of new weavers, resulting in periods of low sales.

Furthermore, the analysis only focuses on gross income, entirely omitting the cost of raw materials such as threads and dyes, loom maintenance, marketing, transportation, and potential workshop space, all of which would significantly reduce net income. Achieving the quality and speed to produce such high-value crafts consistently requires significant skill and experience, a differentiation not made in the analysis. The comparison to a teacher's salary, while sounding appealing at PHP 10,000, needs to be benchmarked against actual teacher salaries in the Philippines, which vary by experience, education level, and whether the institution is public or private. A teacher's salary often comes with benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans, which are not included in the wages.

Weaving, as an entrepreneurial endeavor, also lacks the job security, paid leave, and benefits often associated with formal employment. The ambiguity of the "previous potential" calculation, "200 times 7 days," means that without understanding what this "200" represents, the comparison of the PHP 100 increase lacks a solid foundation. Finally, the analysis assumes every piece woven is of sellable quality, ignoring the real possibility of rejected pieces or those requiring rework, which would impact the effective production rate and income. In essence, while the text aims to motivate by showcasing potential earnings, a deeper analysis reveals a simplified picture that overlooks the complexities and risks inherent in craft-based entrepreneurship.

This suggests that weaving, mainly when focusing on more valuable products, can provide a competitive or even superior

income compared to conventional jobs, thereby enhancing the household's overall. The approach demonstrates the potential of community-based enterprises to foster economic resilience and social empowerment among marginalized groups.

B. Community and Economic Resilience

The impact of weaving as a household income extends beyond individual families. As more women engage in weaving and related entrepreneurial activities, the local economy diversifies, reducing the community's dependence on a single economic sector. This diversification is crucial for long-term economic sustainability, especially in regions prone to conflict or natural disasters. The Dayawan project, for instance, has catalyzed the formation of new economic organizations and encouraged women to explore other livelihood ventures, further strengthening the local economy (World Bank, 2007).

During the 2017 Marawi siege had a devastating impact on Meranaw communities, displacing thousands of families and disrupting livelihoods. In the aftermath of the conflict, weaving has played a pivotal role in the economic recovery and social rehabilitation of affected populations. Social enterprises such as Maranao Collectibles have been instrumental in revitalizing income streams for displaced weavers, providing them with the resources and support needed to rebuild their lives (European External Action Service, 2018). Maranao Collectibles, founded by internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Marawi City, exemplifies how grassroots initiatives can drive post-conflict recovery. According to one of its founders, Bae Basman, she said that...

"During the Marawi Siege, the source of income vanished due to the widespread displacement. I remember wondering what would happened to us. Then, during the siege, Students from IIT would visit me at our rented home, and I would teach them. There was a director who didn't know how to play the kulintang, and I offered to teach him. He later invited me to his house to play the kulintang. That time, Maranao collectibles somehow gained popularity, and people would seek us out when someone wanted to order Langkit"

Reflects the severe disruption to household income experienced by families during the Marawi Siege. Prior to the conflict, many Marawi households relied on stable sources of income such as trading, agriculture, or small businesses. However, the siege led to widespread displacement and destruction, causing the sudden disappearance of these income sources for most residents. It describes how, after displacement, the household had to adapt by finding alternative means of earning. This shift from regular employment or business to informal, service-based, or cultural work is consistent with broader trends observed among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Marawi. The Maranao collectibles gaining popularity and the household leveraging this demand for additional income illustrates the resourcefulness required to cope with the economy.

Driven by Salika Maguindanao-Samad and Jardin Samad, The Maranao Collectibles founder, a social enterprise

composed of evacuees from Marawi City, undertook a significant project: handcrafting the medal ribbons for the 2018 Ironman triathlon using the Meranaw langkit textile (Santos, n.d.; SunStar, 2018). The langkit is a vibrant woven fabric featuring distinctive okir patterns, ly used as decorative strips on ceremonial garments such as landap or malong, embodying the rich cultural heritage of the Meranaw people (Santos, n.d.; ABS-CBN, 2018), Maguindanao-Samad and Samad aimed to revive the fading art of Meranaw weaving by expanding their market reach and leveraging social media for promotion, thereby providing livelihood opportunities for displaced weavers. Their collaboration culminated in the selection of their langkit design for the Ironman medal ribbons, which featured three colors and patterns symbolizing the triathlon disciplines: running, swimming, and biking (SunStar, 2018; Traveling Up, 2018). This selection was made by Daniel de la Cruz, the medal pendant designer, who chose the langkit for its unique aesthetic qualities rather than sympathy for the weavers' displacement, instilling pride in their cultural artistry (SunStar, 2018; Traveling Up, 2018). The cooperatives faced considerable challenges fulfilling the order of 1,200 medal ribbons within four months, especially since many weaving tools and materials were destroyed during the Marawi siege, and most weavers were internally displaced persons (IDPs) starting from scratch (Santos, n.d.; Inquirer, 2018). According to Saadira (mother of Salika) she narrates that...

"The UAAP placed another order with us. Daniel de la Cruz from Cebu ordered langkit from us, and the design featured on that medal is mayansapalaw. For their order of 1200 medal laces, we hired weavers, specifically weavers who are knowledgeable, including weavers from Tugaya, because we couldn't complete 1200 pieces within four months on our own"

Weaving can indeed be a source of income and employment as demonstrated by both individual experiences and organized community efforts. The example you cited—where a large order for 1,200 medal laces required hiring additional skilled weavers—shows that weaving can generate substantial demand and employment, especially when large or specialized orders are involved. This scenario is not unique; it reflects broader patterns observed in various weaving communities.

In the Philippines and other countries, weaving has long served as a primary or supplementary source of income, particularly for women and indigenous groups. For example, pandan weaving is cited as the major source of income among women in certain communities, sometimes even surpassing agriculture in economic importance. Similarly, weaving has allowed individuals and families to support themselves, pay for children's education, and improve their living conditions. Organized weaving groups or associations often act as the main livelihood for their members, with some relying solely on weaving for their income.

However, the economic viability of weaving depends on several factors. While weaving can provide a steady source of income, especially in rural or marginalized areas, the financial returns are often modest. Many weavers work part-time, and the

pay is generally low compared to the effort and skill required. The market for handwoven products is also challenged by cheaper, mass-produced alternatives and shifting consumer preferences, which can limit earning potential. Despite these challenges, there are cases where weaving projects, supported by NGOs or government initiatives, have empowered women and improved household incomes significantly.

There is also a cultural and psychological dimension to weaving as a livelihood. For many, weaving is not only a means of economic survival but also a way to preserve cultural heritage, gain artistic recognition, and maintain community identity. The sustainability of weaving as a source of income depends on continued market demand, support for artisan communities, and efforts to engage younger generations in the craft. Weaving can be a real and meaningful source of income, especially for communities with strong weaving traditions or access to niche markets. However, its profitability and sustainability are influenced by market dynamics, cultural factors, and the level of support from organizations and government. The example of fulfilling a large order by hiring additional weavers illustrates how weaving can generate employment and income, particularly when there is demand for high-quality, culturally significant products.

Beyond this project, The Maranao Collectibles partnered with KulturAKO, a livelihood training initiative supported by the U.S. Embassy in Manila and Naawan HELPS Communities, to teach weaving to youth and help market their products online, fostering sustainable community development (Santos, n.d.). They continue to explore innovative uses of langkit in accessories and collaborate with designers, despite challenges such as limited internet connectivity in Marawi. Maguindanao-Samad emphasized their determination to demonstrate that IDPs are capable of sustaining livelihoods independently of aid, while Jardin Samad expressed their goal to counter negative stereotypes by showcasing the Meranaw people's artistic talents and cultural heritage (Santos, n.d.).

Ultimately, their work with langkit serves as a vibrant narrative sharing Meranaw culture with the world (Santos, n.d.). By securing grants and mentorship from organizations such as the European Union and the British Council, the enterprise has been able to market Meranaw textiles nationally and internationally, expanding the reach and impact of weaving (European External Action Service, 2018). The enterprise's commitment to fair pricing and quality assurance has restored dignity and hope to weavers who had lost everything in the conflict. By providing looms, training, and access to markets, Maranao Collectibles has enabled its members to earn a decent income and regain a sense of purpose and community. The economic benefits of post-conflict weaving initiatives are complemented by their social and cultural significance. Weaving serves as a form of therapy and empowerment for IDPs, helping them to process trauma and rebuild social networks. The revival of crafts also strengthens community cohesion and fosters a sense of shared identity, which is essential for long-term peace and stability. As more men and women participate in weaving, the craft becomes a vehicle for healing and reconciliation, bridging divides and

promoting mutual understanding. Moreover, the success of enterprises like Maranao Collectibles demonstrates the potential of social entrepreneurship to drive inclusive development in conflict-affected areas. By combining economic empowerment with cultural preservation, these initiatives offer a holistic approach to recovery that addresses both material and intangible needs. The recognition and support provided by external partners further validate the importance of local knowledge and agency in shaping sustainable solutions to complex challenges (European External Action Service, 2018).

The involvement of The Maranao Collectibles in crafting the Ironman triathlon medal ribbons using Meranaw langkit has had a significant impact on income, employment, and business growth for the group and the broader community of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Marawi. For income, the enterprise has provided a much-needed source of livelihood for weavers who lost everything during the Marawi siege. Artisans can now earn between P2,400 to P7,000 per week, which has helped sustain their daily needs and restore financial independence, especially as many had previously relied solely on relief goods after losing their homes and jobs during the conflict. The decision to increase the price point of langkit pieces has also made weaving more profitable, encouraging more artisans to participate and ensuring that the craft is valued appropriately as a labor-intensive, handmade product. In terms of employment, The Meranaw Collectibles has grown from a family initiative into a cooperative that now employs around 80 artisans, most of whom are women and IDPs from Marawi and nearby municipalities. By training new weavers, including students and out-of-school youth, through partnerships like KulturAKO, the group is not only preserving cultural heritage but also expanding job opportunities within the community. This has helped shift the mindset of many from dependency on aid to self-sufficiency, as the enterprise demonstrates that sustainable livelihoods are possible even in the aftermath of displacement.

Business growth has been marked by increased demand for langkit products, both locally and nationally, with The Maranao Collectibles supplying high-profile events like the Ironman triathlon and participating in international bazaars. The enterprise has diversified its offerings, developing new products such as bags, accessories, and souvenirs, and is actively seeking collaborations with designers and leveraging social media to reach broader markets. Support from grants and technical assistance has enabled them to scale production, improve equipment, and secure new business partnerships, further strengthening their position as a model for social enterprise-led recovery and cultural preservation in post-conflict settings.

4. Contributions of Meranaw Handicraft to the local Economy of Lanao Del Sur

This discussion aims to provide a detailed analysis of the complex contributions of Meranaw crafts to the economic landscape of Lanao del Sur, examining their role in income generation, employment creation, tourism promotion, and the preservation of cultural identity.

A. Income Generation, Employment, and Cultural Preservation

One of the primary economic contributions of Meranaw crafts lies in their capacity for income generation. The production and sale of these crafts provide a crucial source of livelihood for many Meranaw families, particularly in rural communities where alternative employment opportunities may be limited. Weaving, for instance, is a widespread practice, with women often engaging in the creation of intricate textiles such as the langkit (woven decorative panel), malong (tube skirt), and inaul (woven cloth). These textiles are highly valued for their craftsmanship and cultural significance, fetching considerable prices in local and national markets. Similarly, metalworking, particularly the creation of brassware known as gador (ceremonial urn) and kulintang (gong ensemble), contributes to the income of skilled artisans. Woodcarving, evident in the elaborate designs of panolong (ornate house beam ends) and other architectural elements, also provides a means of sustenance for numerous carvers. The sale of these handcrafted items directly injects capital into the local economy, fostering economic activity and supporting the livelihoods of artisans and their families. Furthermore, Meranaw crafts play a vital role in employment creation. The production of these crafts requires a range of skills, from weaving and metalworking to woodcarving and pottery. This demand for skilled labor creates employment opportunities for individuals within the community, particularly women and youth. The employment generated by the handicraft sector not only provides financial stability but also contributes to the development of skills and the preservation of knowledge. The intergenerational transmission of these skills ensures that the craft traditions remain vibrant and continue to contribute to the local economy. Beyond income generation and employment creation, Meranaw crafts play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural identity. These crafts are tangible representations of Meranaw heritage, embodying the values, beliefs, and artistic traditions of the people. The intricate designs and motifs found in weaving, metalworking, and woodcarving reflect the rich history and cultural narratives of the Meranaw. The preservation of these crafts is essential for maintaining cultural continuity and transmitting knowledge to future generations.

B. Tourism, Entrepreneurship, and Market Expansion

The tourism sector is another significant beneficiary of Meranaw crafts. The unique beauty and cultural significance of these crafts attract tourists to Lanao del Sur, boosting the local economy through increased spending on accommodation, food, and souvenirs. Tourists are often drawn to the region to witness the intricate weaving processes, observe the creation of brassware, and purchase authentic Meranaw crafts. The promotion of Meranaw crafts as tourist attractions can lead to the development of craft villages and workshops, providing tourists with immersive experiences and generating additional income for local communities. The establishment of craft markets and fairs further facilitates the sale of crafts, providing artisans with a platform to showcase their work and reach a wider audience. The increased tourist traffic not only stimulates

the local economy but also raises awareness of Meranaw culture and traditions, promoting cultural exchange and understanding.

Beyond income generation and employment creation, Meranaw crafts play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural identity. These crafts are tangible representations of Meranaw heritage, embodying the values, beliefs, and artistic traditions of the people. The intricate designs and motifs found in weaving, metalworking, and woodcarving reflect the rich history and cultural narratives of the Meranaw. The preservation of these crafts is essential for maintaining cultural continuity and transmitting knowledge to future generations. The practice of handicraft production serves as a cultural repository, safeguarding the skills and techniques that have been passed down through centuries. By supporting the production and preservation of Meranaw crafts, the local economy indirectly contributes to the protection of cultural heritage and the strengthening of community identity.

However, the Meranaw handicraft industry also faces several challenges that hinder its full economic potential. One significant challenge is the lack of access to markets and distribution channels. Many artisans rely on informal networks and local markets to sell their products, limiting their reach and potential income. The lack of access to formal markets and online platforms restricts their ability to compete with mass-produced goods and reach a wider customer base. Another challenge is the rising cost of raw materials, such as silk, brass, and wood, which can impact the profitability of handicraft production. The lack of access to credit and financial resources further constrains the ability of artisans to invest in their businesses and expand their operations.

Furthermore, the issue of cultural appropriation poses a threat to the integrity of Meranaw crafts. The increasing popularity of these crafts has led to the production of imitations and mass-produced versions that often lack the quality and authenticity of handmade items. This not only undermines the value of genuine Meranaw crafts but also deprives artisans of fair compensation for their skills and labor. The need for stronger intellectual property protections and the promotion of ethical sourcing practices are crucial for safeguarding the cultural heritage and economic interests of Meranaw artisans. In addressing these challenges, several strategies can be implemented to enhance the economic contributions of Meranaw crafts. The establishment of cooperatives and associations can provide artisans with collective bargaining power, access to markets, and shared resources. Training and skills development programs can improve the quality and design of crafts, enhancing their marketability. The development of online platforms and e-commerce initiatives can expand the reach of Meranaw crafts to national and international markets.

The promotion of fair trade practices and the establishment of certification programs can ensure that artisans receive fair compensation and that consumers are aware of the authenticity and ethical sourcing of their purchases. Collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private sector entities can provide artisans with access to financial resources, technical assistance, and marketing support. Moreover, the integration of Meranaw crafts into the

formal education system can play a crucial role in preserving cultural knowledge and fostering future generations of artisans. Incorporating weaving, metalworking, and woodcarving into school curricula can ensure that young Meranaws are exposed to their cultural heritage and develop the skills necessary to continue these traditions. The establishment of cultural centers and museums can provide platforms for showcasing Meranaw crafts and educating the public about their cultural significance. Therefore, Meranaw crafts play a complex role in the local economy of Lanao del Sur. They provide a vital source of income and employment, contribute to the tourism sector, and play a crucial role in the preservation of cultural identity. While challenges such as limited market access, rising raw material costs, and cultural appropriation exist, these can be addressed through strategic interventions and collaborative efforts. By investing in the development of the handicraft sector, supporting artisan cooperatives, promoting fair trade practices, and integrating cultural education, the economic contributions of Meranaw crafts can be further enhanced, ensuring the sustainability of these traditions and the prosperity of the Meranaw people.

The contributions of Meranaw artisans and weavers, along with their crafts, to the local economy of Lanao del Sur are profound and complex, rooted deeply in cultural heritage yet dynamically linked to contemporary economic recovery and development. The Meranaw people, indigenous to the area around Lake Lanao, have preserved intricate weaving traditions such as the production of langkit, landap, and malong, which not only embody their cultural identity but also serve as vital economic resources. Three key reasons illustrate the importance of these contributions: cultural preservation and identity reinforcement, economic resilience and livelihood support, and the promotion of local entrepreneurship and market expansion.

Firstly, the weaving practices of Meranaw artisans are fundamental to preserving and reinforcing the cultural identity of the Meranaw community. Weaving, particularly the creation of langkit—a narrow strip of intricately woven fabric—is a distinctive art form that symbolizes the heritage and craftsmanship passed down through generations. The patterns and colors used in these textiles reflect ancestral designs and cultural narratives, thereby maintaining a living connection to Meranaw history and values. This cultural preservation is crucial not only for community pride but also for sustaining the intangible heritage that defines the Meranaw people. Despite challenges such as the decline in weaving popularity and disruptions caused by conflict, efforts by artisans and cooperatives have revitalized the craft, ensuring its continuity and relevance in modern times (MindaNews, 2021; Narrastudio, n.d.; Manila FAME, 2020).

Secondly, Meranaw weaving and crafts have become a vital source of economic resilience and livelihood, particularly in the aftermath of the 2017 Marawi siege, which devastated the local economy and displaced many residents. With homes and properties destroyed, weaving emerged as a critical means for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to rebuild their lives. Government agencies and non-government organizations

introduced weaving as a livelihood program for IDPs, enabling families to generate income through the production and sale of textiles. Cooperatives such as Maranao Collectibles have played a pivotal role in organizing weavers, ensuring fair pricing, and expanding market access, thereby increasing the weavers' take-home pay and encouraging more individuals to engage in the craft. This economic activity helps stabilize families and communities, providing a sustainable income source amid ongoing recovery efforts (MindaNews, 2021; Manila FAME, 2020; Angels of Impact, 2021).

Thirdly, the crafts of Meranaw artisans contribute to local entrepreneurship and market expansion, fostering broader economic development in Lanao del Sur. The establishment of cooperatives and social enterprises has enabled artisans, especially women and youth, to develop their products professionally and reach wider markets. For instance, the Raheemah Peace Weavers Producer Cooperative launched a web and mobile application to market Meranaw products nationally and globally, enhancing the visibility and sales potential of these crafts. Additionally, provincial government support, including financial assistance and plans to create a Meranaw Artisan Village, aims to boost cultural tourism and showcase local craftsmanship, further integrating arts into the regional economy. These initiatives not only empower artisans economically but also stimulate community development and promote the unique cultural assets of Lanao del Sur to a broader audience (PIA, 2024; PIA, 2022).

Therefore, the contributions of Meranaw artisans and their crafts to the local economy of Lanao del Sur are significant due to their role in cultural preservation, economic recovery and livelihood support, and the promotion of entrepreneurship and market expansion. Through their weaving traditions and cooperative efforts, the Meranaw people sustain their cultural heritage while fostering economic resilience and growth in a region marked by historical challenges and ongoing development opportunities.

5. Conclusion

The study of Meranaw crafts reveals a profound economic impact that extends far beyond mere cultural preservation. The meticulous art of weaving, particularly the creation of textiles like the langkit, serves as a powerful engine for economic resilience and social empowerment within Meranaw communities. This analysis demonstrates that the craft is a vital source of household income, a catalyst for business growth, and a critical component of community-wide economic stability, particularly in the face of adversity.

The findings highlight how weaving acts as a crucial supplementary, and often primary, source of income, providing financial predictability and stability in a region where livelihoods, such as agriculture, can be seasonal and unpredictable. The narratives of women like Mabaning and Bae Palao compellingly illustrate how income from weaving directly supports extended families and enables strategic investments in education, breaking cycles of poverty and fostering intergenerational mobility. Organized initiatives, such as the Dayawan Handloom Weavers Association and Maranao

Collectibles, exemplify the power of collective action, standardizing practices, securing markets, and ensuring equitable compensation for artisans.

The economic impact of Meranaw weaving is most evident in the context of post-conflict recovery. The Marawi siege devastated livelihoods, yet weaving emerged as a key instrument for rehabilitation. As demonstrated by the efforts of Maranao Collectibles, the craft provided a tangible means for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to rebuild their lives and regain a sense of dignity and purpose. The high-profile Ironman triathlon order not only provided significant income and employment for dozens of artisans but also showcased the economic viability of the craft on a larger scale. This success story underscores the potential of social enterprises to combine cultural preservation with economic empowerment, creating a model for inclusive and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

However, the analysis also acknowledges the inherent challenges and complexities. While weaving offers significant income potential, its sustainability is contingent upon factors such as consistent market demand, adequate pricing, and access to raw materials. The informal nature of the work often means a lack of benefits and job security. Despite these limitations, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that Meranaw weaving is an indispensable economic force. It empowers individuals, strengthens community cohesion, and demonstrates a powerful capacity for economic resilience, ensuring that this rich cultural heritage is not only preserved but also serves as a foundation for a prosperous future.

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