



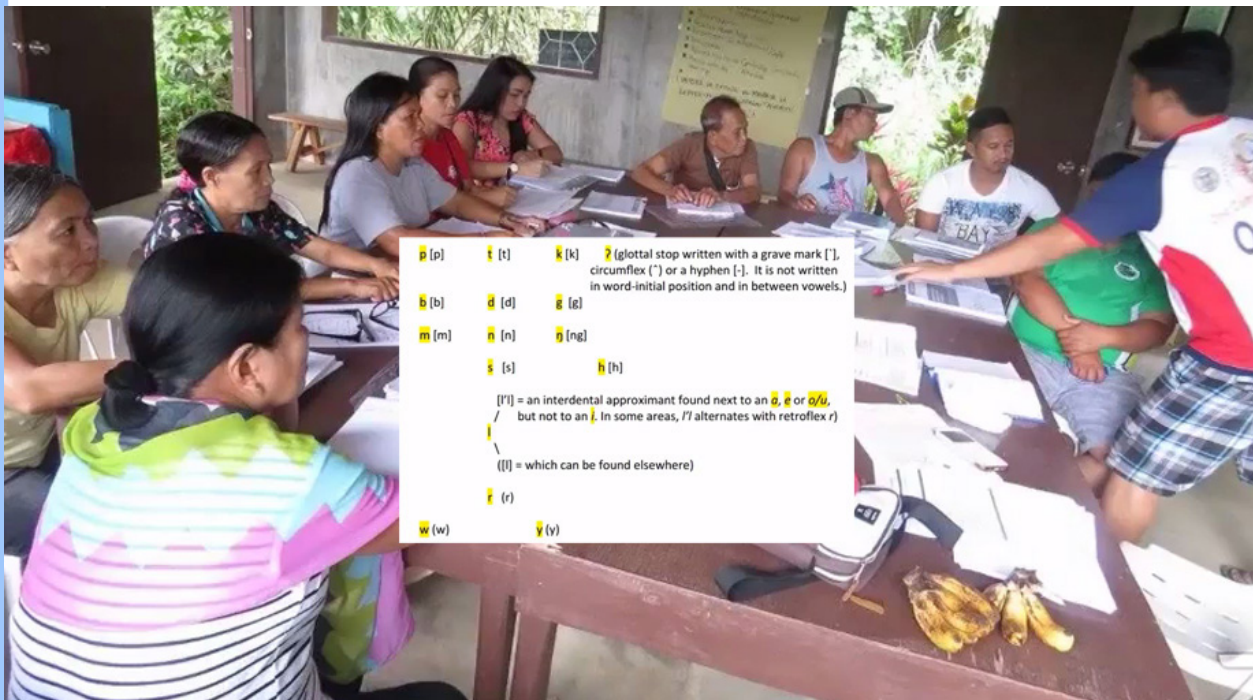
Indigenous Information Service

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Mandaya Indigenous Peoples Seek to Preserve Their Language through a Working Orthography

“Walang wika, walang kultura, ang mababa ang classification kaysa sa iba (No language, no culture, is lower in classification as compared to others) ... Let’s decolonize our mindset that there is a superior and inferior culture.”

Allan G. Farnazo, Department of Education (DepEd) Field Office (FO) XI Regional Director, emphasized the need to eradicate the general thought that some languages or cultures are better than the others during the Mandaya Working Orthography Virtual Roundtable Discussion on 21 August 2021.





Allan G. Farnazo, Department of Education (DepEd) Field Office (FO) XI Regional Director

“A common complaint among indigenous peoples is the non-recognition of their indigenous languages and how they are prevented from speaking these in school. So, this is a historic event as it presents our achievement as far as indigenous languages are concerned,” shared Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Tebtebba Executive Director during her opening remarks for the said discussion. Tauli-Corpuz, also the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, applauded the initiative of the Mandaya indigenous peoples to record their language as she highlighted that “the loss of language, and all that is attached to it (e.g., indigenous knowledge systems and practices), is due to the experiences of discrimination and other socio-historical developments that affected the use and propagation of indigenous languages.”

In line with the celebration of the International Decade of the Indigenous Languages which will begin in 2022, that aims to make sure that these languages get recognized, protected, and restored, Tauli-Corpuz reiterated the need for community-based revitalization of indigenous languages whereby indigenous peoples are able to practice their mother tongues and cultures. She commended the Mandaya for their working orthography as it will help inspire others to initiate the same project.

“The Mandaya in Calapagan decided to build their orthography because of the fear of losing the knowledge systems and practices that are embedded in their language and the subsequent erosion of their identity as Mandaya,” explained Bernice See of the Indigenous Navigator Initiative in the Philippines. Introducing the Mandaya working or-

thography and the designated event presenter, she further narrated that the said document was done with the help of the Mapansa Foundation, an organization that is based in Mindanao, in the southernmost part of the country. With the help of the Indigenous Navigator questionnaires, it was discovered that the said indigenous language was vulnerable as children would only use it on selected occasions or inside their homes and that even adults tended to use a mix of Bisaya—one of the country's more popular languages especially in the south—and Mandaya.

Piloted in 2014, the Indigenous Navigator is a framework and set of tools that aim to support, sustain, and amplify indigenous-led governance, formulated for and by indigenous peoples. With the use of the Indigenous Navigator questionnaires, indigenous

organizations and communities, non-government organizations, and duty bearers can access community-generated data. Hence, systematic monitoring of the implementation, recognition, and protection of indigenous peoples' rights is eventually achieved. The Indigenous Navigator seeks to put forward indigenous peoples' self-determination and the fulfillment of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, and the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

"Ito ang bunga ng inyong pangarap (This is the fruit of your dreams). To all my Mandaya sisters and brothers, through this document, you can see how beautiful your language is. Put it into practice and pass it on to the next generations. This is from you and for you.



Bernice See

Bernice See, Indigenous Navigator Initiative in the Philippines

Mabuhay ang mga Mandaya (Long live the Mandaya indigenous peoples)!" See added.

Norma Mapansa-Gonos, one of the key people responsible for the orthography and the main presenter during the event, discussed the Mandaya indigenous language including its spelling, inflections, glottal stops, and syllables.


Farnazo heartfully enjoined the other presentation observers in his appreciation of and salute to all the Mandaya people who saved a treasure by putting to use a language that is truly theirs.

"Thank you for saving a culture, saving a language, and saving a soul," he said in the event that was participated in by various stakeholders including Mandaya community leaders and members in the Philippines as well as representatives from the DepEd, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), North Cotabato local government units, the University of the Philippines-Mindanao, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and other concerned organizations and individuals.

"Ang wika, ang ating kultura, ay ang ating pinanggalingan (Our language, our culture, is what shapes us). A person's soul lies within the language s/he has first spoken. When we lose a language, we lose a treasure. *Bago mawala ang ating kultura, lenggwahe, at mga kanta, dapat maipon na natin ang mga ito* (Before we lose our culture, language, and songs, we must collect and record them all) ... *Alam kong hindi ito makakamtan kung hindi makabuluhan ang pakikipagtalastasan* (I know that this undertaking won't be attained without in-depth discussion and research work), Farnazo stated.

See, who is also helping facilitate a different orthography of another group of indigenous peoples from another province encouraged the Mandaya people, saying that "this [initiative] is a working orthography."

"Our work doesn't stop here in this presentation. There are still things that need to be done before the community can fully use it. The final users are the children and the teachers who will be teaching it. *Lagi nating isipin ang gumagamit ng wika, sila ang dapat nating pagtuunan ng pansin* (Let us remember that our focus must always be those who are using the language)," she reminded everyone, stressing the significance of improving the Mandaya orthography so that it can be fully utilized by its intended learners.

The Mandaya working orthography is a long-time project that seeks to preserve, promote, and protect the Mandaya indigenous language and culture through the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Framework and the Indigenous Peoples Education Program (IPed) under the DepEd. It is part of a larger endeavor of the Indigenous Navigator Initiative in the Philippines and Tebtebba with funding support from the European Union. 

Written by: Doris Borna Mae Esteban

Edited by: Helen Biangalen-Magata

Layout: Paul Michael Nera

Tebtebba Indigenous Information Service



No. 1 Roman Ayson Road, Baguio City 2600, Philippines
 Tel No.: +63 74 4447703 * Email: tebtebba@tebtebba.org
 Website: www.tebtebba.org