
Weaving the Magic Wand for the IPMC Weavers

As Marjorie Segurigan picked out some of the brightly colored *hablon*ⁱ to display at the town's annual *Hablon* Festival, the urgency of drafting the business development plan for her cooperative weighed heavily on her. As Chairman of the Board of Indag-an Primary Multi-Purpose Cooperative (IPMC), Marjorie presided over the annual General Assembly and monthly board meetings, and she had to present her plan next month. In other duties for IPMC, she also supervised the overall business operations; resolved problems and concerns affecting the day-to-day business operations with the help of Mary Ann Montagot, the General Manager; and with the Board of Directors, drew up plans to ensure the growth and development of the coop business.

Marjorie realized that it was high time that the Board took a more proactive role in strategizing IPMC's future. The increasing competition from other *hablon* entrepreneurs, the need for more creativity and innovation in product design and quality, and the opportunities for expanding the local market while exploring possibilities for export were pressing challenges to IPMC. As a cooperative, IPMC needed to increase its level of productivity, because the coop members depended on weaving as their major source of income.

ⁱ Hablon is a hand woven textile whose name originates from the Hiligaynon term *habol*, meaning "to weave"

The Hablon Heritage

Marjorie had fond memories of growing up in a family of weavers. When she was a little girl, she would curl up in her mother's lap, not for a good story, but to learn how the long rows of colorful thread on the warp were transformed into a wonderful tapestry of colors and designs with the almost magical wave of her mother's hand over the *tiral*ⁱⁱ. She knew it was their family's major source of livelihood, but for Marjorie and her young friends then, the *tiral* was more than livelihood. It was both passion and *kalingawan*ⁱⁱⁱ in a time when the Internet, cable TV, video games, and cell phone were non-existent.

As she grew up, Marjorie learned that this beautiful art of handloom weaving started as far back during the pre-Spanish period, when the Ilonggos wove textile from the materials bartered with the Chinese.¹ Believed to have originated from the historic town of Miagao in Iloilo province,² the tradition of handloom weaving was handed down from one generation to another. Marjorie and her family belonged to a community of weavers; their small community, *Barangay*^{iv} Indag-an, was tucked among the verdant hills and deep forests in the northern part of Miagao (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1
The Municipality of Miagao, Iloilo



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miagao>.31 August 2016

Made of fibrous natural materials, which consisted of *jusi* (banana fiber), *piña* (pineapple fiber), and abaca, as well as locally grown silk threads, cotton, rayon, and other indigenous materials³, the hand woven textile known as *hablon* (from the Hiligaynon term *habol*, meaning to weave)⁴ was used to make beautiful and artistic creations such as the *patadyong* - the colorful, checkered ankle-length wrap-around skirt of the ladies, as well as the equally popular and very saleable shawls, bandanas, bags, and household items such as mosquito nets, blankets, pillow cases, placemats, and table runners. *Hablon* was observed to be “a woman-led trade.”⁵ Young girls were taught weaving by the older weavers and when they were able to weave on their own, they substituted for their mothers and eventually replaced them at the looms and became breadwinners for their families.⁶ Such practice provided a continuous “supply” of weavers and ensured continuity of the traditional industry of hand loom weaving.

iiIlonggo term for the wooden hand-loom

iiiIlonggo term for entertainment

ivThe basic unit of the Philippine local government system

Hablon became a major player in the Philippine textile industry and was at its peak during the 1950s to the 1970s but suffered a decline in the 1980s due to the predominance of machine-made textiles, which also led to a significant decrease in the number of weavers, who started to look for other means of livelihood.⁷ In the late 1980s, Rosette Fajura, the *Barangay* Captain/*Punong Barangay* for *Barangay* Indagan revived the *hablon* industry in the *barangay* with the help of national government agencies, mainly the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Department of Agriculture.⁸ These government agencies bought the locals looms and provided loans to the weaver-entrepreneurs because they didn't have enough capital.⁹ With funding from the Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA), the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Miagao provided them with training on weaving with trainers from among local weavers.¹⁰

In 1991, the DTI helped to revive the *hablon* industry and *hablon* became Miagao's One-Town, One-Product (OTOP).¹¹ In 2001, then Miagao Municipal Mayor Gerardo Flores made the *hablon* industry his priority and enlisted the help of Mr. Nono Palmos, a Miagao resident and international fashion designer, in reviving Miagao's *hablon* industry.¹² During the celebration of the town's foundation anniversary in February 8, 2003, Mr. Palmos staged a *Hablon* Fashion Show at the Miagao Plaza and another exhibition of his *hablon* creations in WOW Philippines' "Pasundayag sang Western Visayas" held in Intramuros, Manila in October 2003.¹³ These efforts sparked the interest of local fashion designers, who developed a particular haute couture from *hablon*, which found its way into several the fashion houses in the United States, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom.¹⁴ Also in 2003, Senator Loren Legarda helped facilitate a financial grant from the British Embassy for Miagao's *hablon* weaving development project.¹⁵ The grant in the amount of P1.4 million^v (USD28,105) was channeled to the Salakayan Foundation -- an LGU organized foundation -- and was used for putting up the IPMC *Hablon* Center in *Barangay* Indagan.¹⁶

In August 2012, the LGU of Miagao constructed a *Pasalubong* (Souvenir) Center across the Miagao Church to serve as a display and storeroom of the town's major products, including *hablon*.¹⁷ The LGU also passed an ordinance requiring all government offices and schools to use *hablon* in their uniforms¹⁸ and allotted P3 million (USD60,186) for the construction of the Miagao Weaving Center in *Barangay* Indagan.¹⁹ To show that *hablon* is part of the local culture, an annual *Hablon* Festival is held every first week of September and highlighted by the Little Miss *Hablon* contest where teens model various *hablon* dresses and gowns.²⁰

To further promote Miagao's *hablon* industry, Mr. Palmos helped the weavers come up with a secondary line to cater to the needs of the retailers.²¹ Furthermore, *hablon* weaving as a course was offered at the Iloilo School of Arts and Trade (ISAT) University in Miagao.²²

A Home for Hablon: The IPMC

Marjorie concluded that her hometown's *hablon* industry had indeed come a long way from being a simple livelihood activity to a full-fledged business undertaking. She remembered that time when *Barangay* Indagan's community of handloom weavers formally organized themselves into the Indagan Primary Multi-Purpose Cooperative and had their first registration with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) in May 31, 1991. Back then, there were 70 members and a capital of P10,000.00 (USD200).²³ Years later, membership increased to 77 with 25 weaver-members and capitalization rose to P500,000.00 (USD10,030). An amount of P50,000.00 (USD1002) was set aside as "rolling capital" for *hablon* production.²⁴ On March

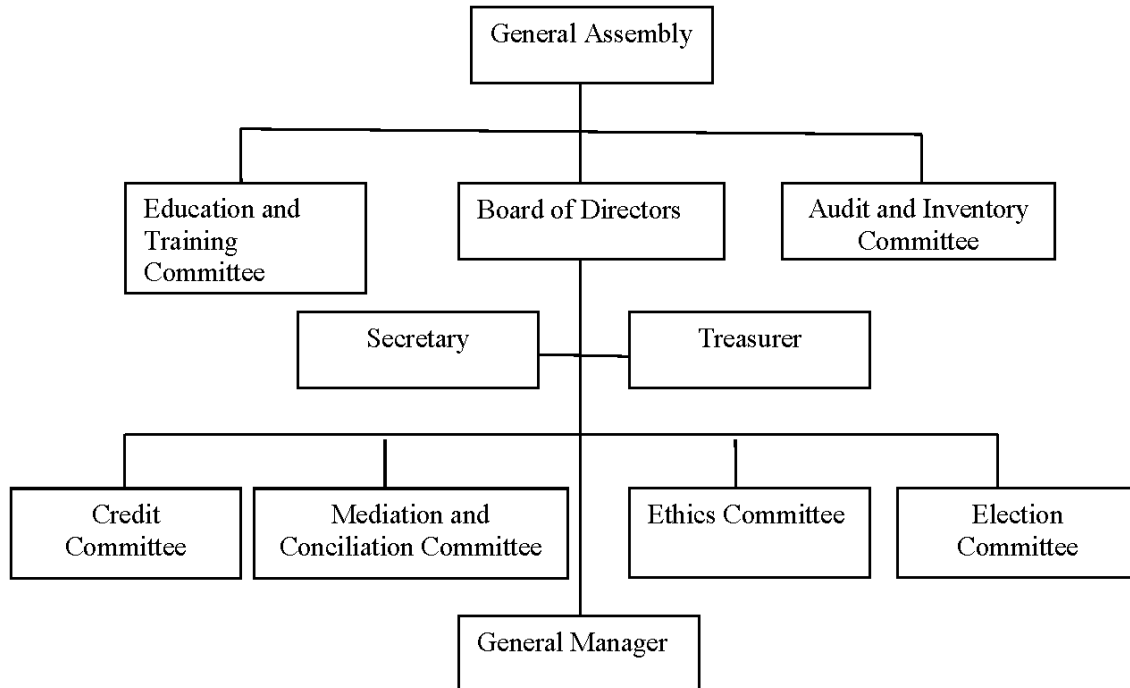
^v Conversions based on 1 USD = 49.83 PHP conversion rate on December 13, 2016 <http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?From=USD&To=PHP> was used on this and all subsequent conversions.

17, 2010, IPMC had a new registration with CDA, as required under the new cooperative law Republic Act 9520, known as the Philippine Cooperative Code of 2008.²⁵

IPMC observed the internationally recognized cooperative principles embodied in Republic Act (RA) 9520. The Philippine Cooperative Code included: voluntary and open membership; democratic member participation; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community. Such principles distinguished cooperatives from other types of business organizations. As an economic and social enterprise, the cooperatives' core values included self-reliance, social justice, and sustainable development.

IPMC's organizational structure followed the basic structure for multi-purpose cooperatives as prescribed in RA 9520 (see Exhibit 2). At the helm of IPMC's structure was the General Assembly -- the highest policy-making body in the cooperative -- which was composed of all coop members who were able to vote. The Board of Directors composed of 15 members was elected from among the coop members. The Election Committee and the Audit and Inventory Committee were elected from the membership and composed of three members each. The Election Committee decided on the rules and regulations governing coop elections, supervised the annual election proceedings, and declared the winners. The Audit and Inventory Committee conducted quarterly financial audits of the cooperative the Credit Committee. Committees appointed by the Board were the following: Credit Committee, Education and Training Committee, Ethics Committee, and Mediation and Conciliation Committee. The Secretary and Treasurer were also appointed by the Board.²⁶

Exhibit 2
Organizational Structure of IPMC



Source: Author's illustration of IPMC's organizational structure based on RA 9520

Production and Marketing Operations²⁷

IPMC had a wide range of *hablon* products (see Appendix 1). Marjorie admitted to herself that *hablon* products could be costly, because the cloth was handmade and production costs were high. For example, machine-made shorts were sold at Php100.00/piece (USD2) only while *hablon* shorts/piece cost Php250.00. In IPMC, the most expensive *hablon* textile included the *barong* (three meters) and *chanipa* design for women's dresses (three meters) at Php700.00 and Php600.00, respectively and the all-over design textile at Php450/meter (USD9) (see Exhibit 3). For household items, the pricey ones were the tablecloth for eight settings at Php1,500.00 (USD30), tablecloth for six settings at Php1,200.00, and placemats (set of eight pieces) at Php450.00/set (USD9). Placemats were produced upon orders only. The cooperative had already stopped production of mosquito nets and blankets due to the unavailability of cotton fiber – the basic material for these products -- in Miagao and the rest of the province of Iloilo. Polyester could not be used as substitute for cotton.

Exhibit 3
IPMC Hablon Products and their Prices

Products	Prices
Ready-to-Wear Plain Shawls (22 meters x 22 inches)	P 280.00
Ready-to-Wear Shawls with Abstract Design (22 meters x 22 inches)	350.00
<i>Patadyong</i> (four meters)	310.00
<i>Barong</i> (three meters)	700.00
Chanipa design for dress (textile-three meters)	600.00
Table cloth (eight place setting)	1,500.00
Table cloth (six place settings)	1,200.00
<i>Bandana</i>	70.00
Hankerchief (small)	60.00
All-over rotex textile (medium and full rotex)	200.00/meter
Placemats (six pieces)	350.00
Placemats (eight pieces)	450.00
Wallets for boys	
Small	40.00
Medium	60.00
Large	80.00
<i>Buon-buon</i> (small wallet for ladies made from left over textile or <i>retazos</i>)	100.00

Source: IPMC

Marjorie made a mental note of IPMC production personnel, working hours, and hand looms. Among the 25 weavers, 23 were women and two were men. The coop had 30 functional *tirals*. Weavers came to work between 8 to 9:00 in the morning and were off at 11 or 11:30 noon to pick up their kids from school and eat lunch with them at home. After taking their kids back to school, the weavers would be back to work at 1:00 in the afternoon and left at 5:00pm. An individual weaver working an average of six hours a day could produce an average of three to four shawls per day. In the case of textiles, a weaver could finish three meters of textile per day. Weavers were paid as follows: Php70.00/shawl (USD1.40); Php60.00 (USD1.20) for three meters of either plain or checkered textile; Php70.00/meter (USD1.40) for textile with glimmering thread designs; Php200.00 (USD4) for three meters of textile with all-over/full design; Php150 (USD3) for three meters of textile with not-so-elaborate design; Php25.00 (USD.50) per handkerchief; and Php250.00 (USD5) per three meters of *barong*.

With the absence of cotton fiber, IPMC made use of synthetic threads and purchased them at Shanghai Bazaar in downtown Iloilo City. In one month, IPMC was able to use up an average of 1,000 cones of thread. However, Marjorie was worried that the supply of local *piña* (pineapple) fiber obtained from the province of Aklan, might run out because it was being exported to other countries. Piña fiber was the basic material for the *barong tagalong*, which was one of the coop's most saleable items. *Piña* was needed for the *barong* and *Filipiniana*, which were the national costumes for the Filipino gentlemen and Filipina women, respectively. To ensure a reliable and adequate supply of *piña* fiber, she hoped that maybe someone would lobby the government for a legislation to stop the export of the local *piña* fibers.

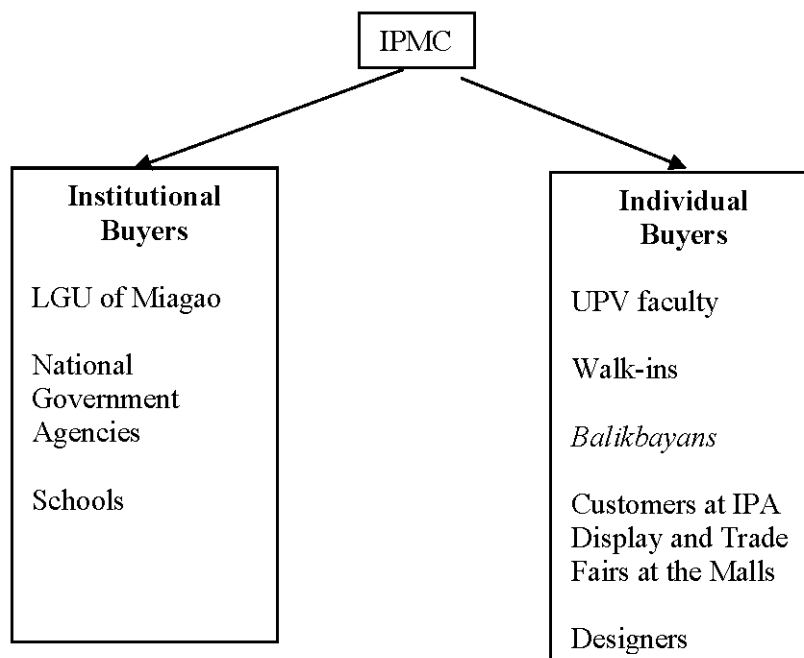
Hablon weaving followed an intricate process that started with deciding on the patterns and colors to be used for the product and then weaving to create the desired *hablon* product (see Appendix 2).²⁸ However, Marjorie observed that IPMC's *hablon* products could not be exactly differentiated from those of its competitors. She attributed this concern to the fact that hand loom weavers received the same trainings on *hablon* production and thus, *hablon* weavers developed skillsets in design and color combinations that were quite similar to each other. Marjorie wished that IPMC products would have some features that would distinguish them from those of other *hablon* entrepreneurs.

Cash-on-hand and cash-on-delivery were the modes of selling for personally delivered items. In the case of orders, customers were required to give a down payment, which was fifty percent of the total cost of the orders. For out-of-town orders, products were sent by courier, while those within the province were simply picked up by customers from the IPMC *Hablon* center in *Barangay* Indag-an.

Hablon was promoted through trade fairs and festivals organized by local government units and national government agencies like DTI. In 2016, the market for IPMC's *hablon* consisted of institutional as well as individual buyers (see Exhibit 4). Institutional buyers included the municipal government of Miagao, national government agencies such as the Department of Tourism, and educational institutions in Miagao, which included the Kaularan Integrated School Foundation, Indag-an Elementary School, and ISAT University. Schools ordered *hablon* for the uniforms of students and faculty members.

Individual buyers came from the nearby University of the Philippines Visayas; walk-ins were mostly local as well as foreign tourists, *balikbayans* or Filipinos who were living and/or working abroad and were home for a vacation and usually made purchases of *hablon* products to give as *pasalubongs* (gifts) to loved ones and friends abroad. Other individual customers were those who bought items displayed at trade fairs. Other individual buyers included local designers such as members of the Designers' Guild of Iloilo, who integrated *hablon* into their designs.²⁹

Exhibit 4
Marketing Flow of IPMC Hablon Products



Source: Author's illustration of IPMC's marketing flow based on information from Marjorie Segurigan

The Business Landscape³⁰

Marjorie knew that before she could map out IPMC's development plan, she needed to take stock of IPMC's business landscape, which included both the general and industry environments. At the global level, she sensed an emerging market for hand woven textile. However, in her recent trip to Thailand as one of the Philippines's representative to OTOP Silapacheep 2016,^{vi} Marjorie learned much to her dismay that IPMC's *hablon* could only be put on exhibit and not for sale because the Asian market preferred *hablon* made of natural fiber particularly, cotton.

The emerging global demand for textile made from natural fibers stemmed from the increasing consciousness for health and wellness. Synthetic fibers were processed using chemicals that could be hazardous to health. At the local level, the concern for health and well-being was coupled with climate change. Thus, local customers had started to ask for cotton-made *hablon* fabrics, which were cool to wear in the hot weather.

IPMC's products were made of synthetic thread because cotton was no longer grown in the Visayan region. Ilocos and other towns in Northern Philippines grew cotton, which was the basic fiber in the production of hand woven cloth almost similar to the *hablon*, but known as *abel* in the Ilocano dialect. Given the present demand for cotton-made *hablon*, at both the local and Asian market, Marjorie knew her coop could not meet such demand at the present, much less compete in the Asian *hablon* market. She was

vi OTOP Silapacheep 2016 was an exhibit and sale of OTOP producers' quality products from Asian countries held in celebration of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's 7th Cycle birthday anniversary.

thinking of exploring alternatives to cotton such bougainvillea, mango, and banana, and using only the native *tawas* (alum) in processing these plants into fiber.

The LGU^{vii} of Miagao had always been supportive of the town's handloom weaving industry and, through the years, had made various efforts to revive the industry and make handloom weaving as the town's major industry. At the national level, IPMC could get national government support for its *hablon* enterprise because promotion and development of cooperatives was a policy of the state. Thus, the national government had always given preferential treatment to cooperative enterprises. RA 9520 provided tax incentives as well as various social and economic benefits to cooperatives.³¹ Other national government legislation on business development that could provide benefits to IPMC included the Magna Carta for Small, Micro, and Medium Enterprises (RA 9501);³² the *Barangay* Micro Business Enterprise (BMBE) Act of 2002 (RA 9178)³³; and the Philippine Local Government of 1991 (Republic Act 7650),³⁴ which granted exemptions on local taxes, fees, and charges to cooperatives.

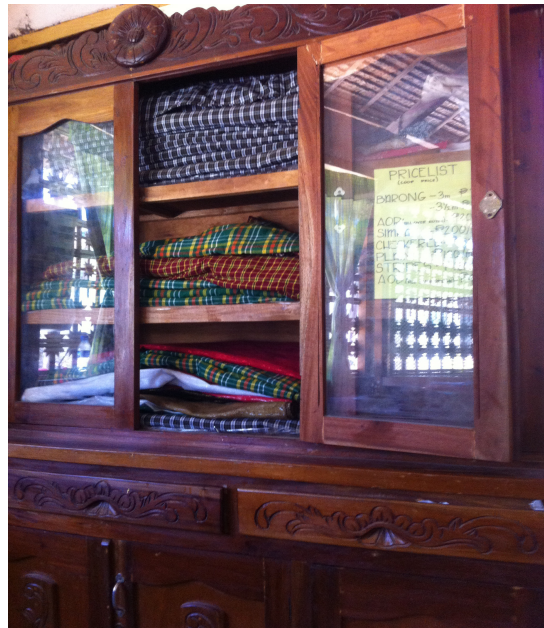
Marjorie was glad for the support that came from the government as well as the private sector for IPMC. These included Sen. Loren Legarda's donation in the amount of P50,000.00 (USD1002) for production activities of IPMC and payment for the fees at the *SikatPinoy* booth exhibit of IPMC in Manila in early 2016 as well as sponsorship of IPMC's participation in trade fairs-all by DTI and the LGU of Miagao. Mr. Henry Sy, a well-known Chinese-Filipino businessman and philanthropist donated P680,000.00 (USD13,640) to the Miagao Loom Weavers Association (MLWA) and the cash donation was given in the form of ten new *tirals* for each of the member-enterprises of MLWA. IPMC, being a MLWA member received, its share of the *tirals*.

Marjorie felt that the present market alone could keep IPMC's *hablon* business growing. It would be good if IPMC gets received of the LGU's and national government agencies orders for *hablon* textile, which was used for office uniforms, but some of the orders went to the coop's competitors. Other *hablon* enterprises in Miagao included Rayden's Hand-woven Products, Natinga Hand-woven Products, Valencia Hand-woven Products, and Imee's Hablon. These groups were IPMC's fellow members in MLWA. Because *hablon* was considered a heritage industry not only in Miagao, but in the entire Iloilo province, there were other *hablon* enterprises such as in the towns of Oton, Dueñas, and Tigbauan, and the district of Villa in Iloilo City. Marjorie observed that since the *hablon* regained its popularity, many new *hablon* entrepreneurs have recently emerged. These new entrants were taking advantage of the growing market for *hablon* products.

Having walked through IPMC's wide competitive landscape, Marjorie knew that IPMC's chances for sustainability would require choosing an appropriate business strategy complemented by a strategic action plan. However, IPMC also needed to articulate its strategic mandate -- its vision, mission and goal statements. IPMC could not afford to lose to the competition. The tradition and history of handloom weaving had to be preserved, along with the lives, welfare, and future of IPMC weavers and their families. Marjorie had a big task ahead of her.

vii LGU stands for local government unit

Appendix 1
IPMC *Hablon* Products



Appendix 2 The *Hablon* Production Process

1. Planning

First, plan the patterns and colors to be used for your product. Thread the cones with your selected colors. The cones will then be arranged according to the desired pattern.

2. Warping (*Sab-ong*)

Set the threads on the warping tool. The threads are grouped and rolled along the bamboo pegs of the warping frame. *Note: The threads are counted by hand depending on the length and width of your product.*

3. Beaming (*Likes*)

The threads set on the warp frame will then be rolled along the weaver's beam. It is the bamboo cylinder at the upper back portion of the loom.

4. Hedding (*Sulod sa Binting*)

Each thread that is set on the warp must pass through the opening of the heddles to separate the warp threads for the passage of the weft.

5. Reeding (*Solod sa Sulud*)

Each thread is then inserted on each opening of the metal reed using a "reed hook" (*they use a bamboo hook*)

6. Tie (*Higot sa Baston*)

After reeding, the ends of the threads are tied into the cloth roll. The cloth roll is a wooden can found at the base of the loom.

7. Spooling (*Panglinyas*)

Weft the thread needed for the shuttle. The weft is the filing thread used in weaving. It will then be spooled using the traditional spooling wheel. The shuttle is a holder that carries the thread which is thrown back and forth between the warp threads.

8. Weaving (*Habol*)

Weaving is the final step to start creating your product. The weaver steps on the bamboo pedal to raise or lower the heddle. The weft is propelled back-and-forth across the loom by a shuttle. Then the wefts are neatly pushed against the fell of the cloth by the reed.

Source: Piccio, Belle. Iloilo's Best: The Intricate Process of Miagao's Hablon Weaving. January 26, 2016. Accessed 30 November 2016. <http://www.choosephilippines.com/specials/products/3819/hablon-weaving-miagao/>.

Endnotes

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- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Segurigan, Marjorie. Personal Interview. 24 August, 2016.
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