# WHAT WE DO

*One Weave, One Dream is broken down into different focus areas that work together in providing a livelihood opportunity for the women by educating the public and the t'nalak weavers themselves while creating a sustainable system of production for the community.*

## GENERAL EDUCATION

One Weave, One Dream strives to educate consumers, textile entusiasts, and the world about the beauty and tradition of the t'nalak. Through this website, advertisements, events and exhibits, we hope to increase the value of the product which helps drive consumers to One Weave retail channels to generate sales.

*The T'boli women and their families showing off some of their finished t'nalak*

## VILLAGE EDUCATION

Various educational sessions are organized by One Weave, One Dream and volunteers to help educate the women about the goals of the organization. It empowers the women through cultural heritage, and connects the weavers with each other.

## SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN

At One Weave, One Dream, we ensure a sustainable and long-term production through various initiatives that protects the raw materials needed in creating the t'nalak. We practice sustainable cultivation of the fiber, natural dyes and wood for looms and encourage community planting.

## ONLINE MARKETPLACE

Our online retail channel provides the weavers access to local and international markets by connecting them to a wider market. It helps increase the product's visibility and helps generate funds, alleviate the weavers from poverty.

# THE T'NALAK PROCESS

*Making the t'nalak is tedious and requires numerous steps for a single cloth to be completed. Listed below are the steps which begin from the harvestinf of the raw material to the burnishing and washing of the completely woven fabric.*

## STEP ONE: *KEDUNGON* OR ABACA PLANT

***Harvesting of the abaca and the stripping of the fibers***

Making the t'nalak begins by gathering the raw material used in weaving found in the stems of the abaca plant or the kedungon. This plant is from the same family as the banana tree.

The harvesting of the abaca requires physical brawn and this important task is designated to a T'boli man. Before harvesting begins, he sets up a prayer table and says a prayer to Fu Dalu. With a sharp knife, he slashes the tree diagonally at a few inches from the ground.

In order to produce a 14–meter long t'nalak, six abaca plants must be harvested. In addition, the plants need to be two to three years old and the diameter of their trunks at about 14–18 inches before harvesting.

The trunk is then stripped off its layers and the first few pieces are laid on a triangular offering table for Fu Dalu. The succeeding strips are then inserted between a block of wood held securely to a horizontal beam with a large knife pressing down on it. The abaca harvester would then pull the stalk through the two, separating the pulp from the abaca fiber.

*The layers of the abaca stalks are stripped apart*

After stripping, the fibers would have to be combed immediately so as to remove the sap that causes the darkening of the strands. It is hung from a housebeam and combed with the fingers where the weaver selects and separates the fibers according to their thickness. During the selection of the fibers, the whiter and finer threads found in the inner stalks are separated from the coarser ones. The fibers are spread on a beam and left to dry inside the house.

*Abaca strands after they have been dried and hung*

## STEP TWO: CONNECTING OR TEMBONG

***Segregating the fibers and connecting them from end to end***

After air-drying the newly harvested fibers for at least 24 hours or until they are adequately supple, the fibers are grouped into wrist-size bundles. To soften the fibers, the women take the abaca strands and hand-rub or squeeze them, using a motion like washing clothes, to make

# THE T'NALAK PROCESS

them pliant. This motion produces a zigzag pattern which helps the weavers to easily identify and segregate the strands according to quality. Fine fibers are reserved for the warp or the lengthwise threads, and the thicker fibers are used for the weft or the crosswise threads.

Once dried, the women individually connect the fibers from end to end by tying tiny knots. The ends are cut with a suk t'bong (small weaver's blade) in order to make the connections invisible. They are then bundled together by winding the threads around a bamboo warp frame as a set of three and placed in baskets. It can take a weaver up to two weeks to be able to complete the standard length needed for the T'nalak. Around 35-40 blitus or bundles, with each bundle having 100-200 fibers of 1.5–2.5 meters in length, are needed to complete a 10 meter by 63 centimeters wide piece of t'nalak.

*Hand-rubbing the fibers to make them more pliant*

## STEP THREE: SETTING OR SEMDANG

***Preparing or setting the fibers on the loom for knotting***

Once the raw material has been prepared, the connected fibers that make up the warp are set on the *gono smoi* or loom. This special loom is composed of a comb-like wooden frame with teeth pointing upwards to preserve the fibers' length and silkiness. After the fibers are smoothened out, they are placed evenly and closely spread on the *gono smoi* and held in place by a *teladay* or wooden bar that is laid across and directly over the fiber.

*Tyeing or designing the t'nalak*

## STEP FOUR: DESIGNING OR MEBED

***Knotting the fibers prior to resist-dyeing***

The next phase is the design process called *mebed*, which begins on the tying frame. This delicate task of knotting the warp for the resist-dye method determines the design of the t'nalak. This is a tedious and intricate process, that can take up to four to five weeks as knot after knot is tied into place.

Without the use of any physical sketches or patterns, the women carefully tie knots on the warp according to a mental picture of the traditional design.

The tying is done by first grouping fibers into four or fives. Depending on the intricacy of the design, they are then knotted together using a separate piece of abaca that is dyed black and coated with beeswax.

*A cole-up of the tied fibers on the frame*

# THE T'NALAK PROCESS

Since the knots determine the area which must not be dyed, the knots must be very tight. The first knots tied are reserved for preserving the natural color of the abaca. The second set of knots are for the areas to be dyed red. This whole process takes place during the day where there is plenty of light.

## STEP FIVE: DYEING OR TEMOGO & UNTYING OF KNOTS OR HEMTO

***Gathering and preparing the natural dyes, dyeing the warp and untying knots***

A t'nalak is defined by using the three traditional colors: black, red and white. In coloring the abaca strands, the T'boli women make use of natural dyes found in vegetation around their area. This process of resist-dye is commonly known as the *ikat* method that is shared with the neighboring countries of Indonesia and Thailand.

*Hitem,* or the black dye, is derived from leaves of the *k'nalum* tree. Once rice sack worth of leaves is gathered, pounded, placed into a large pot of water, and boiled. After two to four hours, the *bed* or tied fibers are placed inside. The cooking of the fibers takes an average of three weeks with the fire being refueled three times each day and the leaves and berries replaced every two days. It is important that the strands are evenly and fully coated.

Once fully absorbed with the deepest black, the tied fibers are removed and rinsed in running water through a stream until the water runs clear. It is then air dried for about two days before the knots that have been tied, reserved for the red portions, are carefully removed with the *suk t'bong* or small knife.

*Hulo,* or the red dye, is taken from the roots and bark shavings of the small-leafed *loko* tree. Around one kilogram of the *loko's* bark and roots are boiled in water for another half hour. The *bed* is then added and allowed to boil from five days to one week. Once done, the *bed* is removed and rinsed thoroughly until the water runs clear and then air-dried.

On the next day, the knots that were used to protect the *bukay,* the natural creamy white or ecru color, of the abaca strands are removed to reveal its naturalcolor. Finally, the last stage involves the gentle separation of the untied and dyed fibers and combing them to prepare the *bed* for weaving on the backstrap loom.

*A pot filled with boiling water and k'nalum leaves*

*Close-up of the strands after it has been dyed red and black and is ready for untying*

# THE T'NALAK PROCESS

## STEP SIX: WEAVING OR MEWEL

***Setting the dyed warp on the backstrap loom***

The T'boli backstrap loom or the *legogong*, is a form of horizontal two-bar or two-beamed loom where one bar is attached to the ceiling bamboo beam of the T'boli longhouse and the second beam, or the backstrap, is attached to the weaver's lower back.

The longhouse is a structure specifically built for the production of the t'nalak. Because the length of the t'nalak can exceed over 10–meters, a horizontal structure is needed. In addition, the t'nalak must be woven in a cool area or the fibers will snap.

When the t'nalak weaver works, she weaves in a rhythm. After passing the shuttle through the threads, she pushes the threads to tighten using a flat piece of coconut wood made smooth and shiny with use. She does this three times in order to ensure that the weaves are tight so that when help up against the light, the t'nalak blocks as much light from passing through. The weaving stage can take around 14 days to a month depending on the "character" of the fiber and the complexity of the design.

After the t'nalak has been fully woven, the fabric is thoroughly washed in a cold river so that the entire piece can be stretched following the water flow. Once it has been slightly air-dried, the t'nalak is then beaten repeatedly with a hard and round wooden stick in order to flatten the knots. This helps to smoothen its surface in preparation for burnishing.

*Yab Man weaves a t'nalak on the backstrap loom*

*Close-up of the fibers on the loom*

## STEP SEVEN: IRONING OR SEMAKI

***Burnishing the surface of the t'nalak***

The final phase of producing the t'nalak involves burnishing the surface with a *saki* or cowrie shell, while the fabric is still moist. This shell is attached to one end of a bamboo stick with the other end attached to a hole in the ceiling of the longhouse to help apply additional pressure to the procedure. This task involves a strong body, as the shell is firmly rubbed repeatedly on the t'nalak in order to flatten it and produce an even coruscating gloss.

Once the burnishing is done, the t'nalak is washed in cold water at a steady flowing stream after which it is hung and dried. When completed, the t'nalak is stored by rolling it and wrapping it with a separate cloth to protect it from damage.

*Jun burnishes the surface of the t'nalak with a cowry shell*