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From Tradition to Transformation: Indigenizing Fitness Through Hataw Higaonon

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The Higaonon tribe of Iligan City, Northern Mindanao, is renowned for its rich cultural traditions, including dances that embody their spirituality, lifestyle, and identity. While existing scholarship has largely documented these dances in descriptive or ethnographic form, there is limited integration of such movements into structured, culturally responsive fitness programs.

Addressing this gap, this study developed Hataw Higaonon, a low-impact dance fitness routine that blends indigenous Higaonon movements with contemporary exercise design. Guided by the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework and the Successive Approximation Model (SAM), the research utilized a qualitative approach through immersive methods such as community consultations, cultural validation, participant observation, and focus group discussions.

From seven documented Higaonon performances, four were identified as culturally permissible for non-Higaonons, leading to the validation of seven essential steps which were choreographed into the Hataw Higaonon routine. The prototype was video-documented and pilot-tested with selected participants to ensure authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and practical applicability. Findings from cultural experts and participants revealed that the routine was culturally relevant, engaging, and enjoyable, while simultaneously fostering appreciation of Higaonon heritage.

The study concludes that Hataw Higaonon functions not only as a fitness intervention but also as a cultural archive, providing innovative pathways for cultural preservation, health promotion, and social identity reinforcement. These outcomes underscore the potential of indigenized fitness programs to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), by fostering inclusive, community-driven approaches to wellness and cultural continuity.

Authors: Mx PADAYOGDOG, Manuel Jr (Graduate Teaching Assistant); Dr SAN DIEGO, Chiedel Joan

Presenter: Mx PADAYOGDOG, Manuel Jr (Graduate Teaching Assistant)

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