

Indigenous Foods of Alilem, Ilocos Sur: A Systematic Review on Documentation, Decline, and Preservation

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Abstract: This review synthesizes literature on the documentation and preservation of indigenous foods, focusing on their cultural significance, the factors contributing to their decline, and strategies for safeguarding them. The objective is to examine how modernization, migration, commercialization, and changing lifestyles affect indigenous food practices, while highlighting the role of documentation in preserving culinary heritage. Literature was gathered from ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Philippine E-Journals, covering studies published between 2015 and 2025. Findings consistently emphasize that indigenous foods are vital components of intangible cultural heritage, serving as markers of identity, social cohesion, and biodiversity conservation. However, modernization and dietary transitions have led to reduced reliance on traditional food systems, weakening intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge. Documentation—through oral histories, inventories, and digital archives—emerges as a key preservation tool, while community-based programs, cultural festivals, and policy support are identified as effective promotion strategies. Despite global recognition of indigenous food systems, localized studies in Alilem, Ilocos Sur remain scarce. This synthesis underscores the importance of context-specific documentation and preservation initiatives to sustain indigenous culinary traditions. Recommendations include integrating indigenous food knowledge into education, strengthening community participation, and developing tourism-based promotion programs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background Context

Indigenous foods embody cultural heritage, identity, and ecological knowledge. UNESCO (2022, 2024) recognizes foodways as intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing their role in transmitting traditions across generations. In the Philippines, indigenous foods are closely tied to farming practices, rituals, and community life, yet modernization and commercialization threaten their continuity.

➤ Scope and Purpose

This review focuses on literature examining indigenous foods as cultural heritage, factors contributing to their decline, documentation strategies, and preservation measures. Studies outside food heritage or unrelated to cultural preservation are excluded.

➤ Thesis Statement / Objective

The review aims to synthesize research on indigenous food systems, identify challenges posed by modernization, and

highlight documentation and preservation strategies, with emphasis on gaps in localized studies in Alilem, Ilocos Sur.

II. METHODOLOGY

➤ Search Strategy

- Databases: ERIC, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, Philippine E-Journals. Search terms: *indigenous foods, cultural heritage preservation, food documentation, modernization and food decline, Philippine indigenous food systems.*

➤ Selection Process

- Inclusion criteria:
 - ✓ Studies focusing on indigenous foods and cultural heritage.
 - ✓ Research examining modernization, migration, or commercialization impacts.
 - ✓ Published between 2015–2025.

- Exclusion criteria:
 - ✓ Studies focusing solely on nutrition without cultural context.
 - ✓ Non-empirical reports or opinion pieces.

III. MAIN BODY

➤ Theme 1: Indigenous Foods as Cultural Heritage

UNESCO (2022) and Reyes-García et al. (2019) highlight indigenous foods as cultural symbols that reinforce identity and social cohesion. FAO (2021) emphasizes their role in rituals and celebrations, while Johns et al. (2021) link indigenous food systems to biodiversity conservation.

➤ Theme 2: Modernization and Decline

Damman et al. (2018) and Kuhnlein et al. (2019) observed that modernization shifts dietary preferences toward processed foods, weakening reliance on traditional food systems. Toledo & Burlingame (2020) noted that modernization contributes to cultural erosion and biodiversity loss.

➤ Theme 3: Documentation of Indigenous Foods

FAO (2021) and UNESCO (2021) emphasize documentation as a preservation tool, enabling communities to record recipes, preparation methods, and cultural meanings. Berkes (2021) highlights Indigenous Knowledge Systems Theory, which explains how traditional knowledge sustains communities through environmental adaptation.

➤ Theme 4: Ingredients, Preparation Methods, and Biodiversity

UNESCO (2022) documents traditional techniques such as fermentation, drying, and smoking. Kuhnlein & Erasmus (2019) stress intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge, while Johns et al. (2021) link indigenous food practices to sustainable biodiversity management.

➤ Theme 5: Preservation and Promotion Strategies

UNDP (2022) and UNPFII (2023) identify community-based programs, food festivals, and cultural exhibitions as effective preservation strategies. WIPO (2021, 2023) emphasize policy support and intellectual property protection for indigenous knowledge.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Summary of Main Findings

Indigenous foods are vital cultural heritage assets, but modernization, migration, and commercialization contribute to their decline. Documentation and community-based preservation strategies are essential for sustaining culinary traditions.

➤ Significance

This synthesis highlights the importance of localized documentation and preservation initiatives in Alilem, Ilocos Sur, where indigenous food traditions remain under-documented.

➤ Future Research

- Conduct localized documentation of indigenous foods in Alilem, Ilocos Sur.
- Explore the combined effects of modernization, migration, and commercialization on food decline.
- Investigate tourism-based promotion strategies to sustain indigenous culinary heritage.

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