

## How Celo Powered a Small Community of Philippine Weavers to Access International Markets



By [Bernard Joseph Guaren](#)

The Nagbasaan Loom Weavers Cooperative in the Philippine municipality of Paoay, Bacoa Norte, was established in 1992 to organize the remaining practitioners of hand-weaving, a traditional method of textile production seen only around Paoay Lake. Composed mostly of women whose single source of income is from weaving, the Cooperative had been a pivotal economic driver in the community.

While the money earned from weaving doesn't guarantee a way out of poverty, it has provided the weavers with three meals a day and schooling for their children. But when the coronavirus pandemic hit the region in early 2020, it changed everything. Fewer tourists caused retail clients to close shops, and the weavers suffered financially as a result.



The beautiful fabrics of the Nagbasaan Loom Weavers Cooperative.

Before the pandemic, the weavers earned \$3-4 US a day, on average. When the first lockdown was implemented in March 2020, income from weaving was lost. As time went on, so, too, did the lockdown. Textile production came to a grinding halt. Without any daily income, some weavers chose to abandon their craft; others were forced to borrow money from lenders at high interest rates.

### Community Profile: Paoay Loom Weavers



### The Journey into the World of Crypto with Celo

The pandemic stifled tourism, cancelled fashion events, trade fairs, and exports, and exposed the vulnerability of the Philippine weaving industry. The weavers were robbed not only of their main source of income but also their identities. Many wondered how they could continue to call themselves weavers when they couldn't afford the materials to practice their craft. The Cooperative was about to lose hope when word of their plight reached Celo community members in the Philippines.

The Celo community, in cooperation with [ImpactMarket](#), a crowd-funding platform built on the Celo blockchain, approached the Cooperative to pilot an anti-poverty program that uses mobile technology. The weavers agreed, and for the following seven months, select members of the Cooperative received an unconditional weekly income of 10 cUSD (Celo dollars) right to their phones via the [Bakam mullu mullu app](#). The cUSD received equated to 400-500 PHP, meant financial security in a time of need.



Because most of the weavers do not own smartphones, they had to borrow phones from their children, and then learn how to use digital currency. The community members helped each other understand and navigate the applications, and trust in the program was quickly forged. The weavers even agreed to designate three people to post their cUSD to simplify encashment and to reduce the total amount of encashment service fees.

Overall, the impact of weekly income assistance through ImpactMarket was powerful. Watch [Bianca Lina](#) on YouTube.



**Gladys Tapia**, a mother of three in her mid 60s, used some of the money she received as a start-up capital for her home production and, which is now saving her an extra \$3 a day.



**Foring Cabagon**, a 67-year-old weaver living on her own, used the money to buy materials she allowed her to reorganize after months of working.



**Theresa Tapasa**, 63, never imagined she and others in the community would benefit from opportunity. Now, thanks to the program, she's a confident weaver.

### Using Blockchain and Mobile-First Technology to Strengthen Their Craft

ImpactMarket assistance kept the weavers afloat temporarily, but the women wanted to continue to do what they love in the longer term by reaching more customers. While their products are of high export quality, the weavers did not have direct access to international markets or the knowledge to penetrate them. The only way for them to sell their products abroad was through middlemen, who profit significantly by undercutting and short-changing local artisans.

To take more control of their business and profit margins, Cooperative members came up with the idea to use the [Valora](#) mobile wallet as a payment platform through which they could accept orders from abroad. They also chose to use Google Docs to catalogue their products. In July 2021, they tested the idea by offering their products to members of the Celo community in Germany, France, and the United States. The pilot was a success, with the weavers receiving cUSD equivalent to \$953 US in their Valora wallet from buyers of their products.

### July Export Pilot Results



The easy-to-use Valora mobile app opened new markets to the weaver community, leading them to explore another decentralized application ([dApp](#)) built on Celo, [PayChain](#). PayChain empowers merchants of all sizes to take advantage of cryptocurrency for fast, low-cost payments. The weavers opened a store through PayChain, which increased their visibility and helped them become even more independent.

### Empowering Tradition and Small Businesses

Celo technology not only enables the Nagbasaan Loom Weavers Cooperative and small businesses like it to weather challenges, create more value, and sell their products globally, but also inspires developers around the world to help grow the Celo ecosystem by building decentralized applications for artists and entrepreneurs on the Celo blockchain.

To support the Cooperative, donate through [ImpactMarket](#) or visit the [Celo's Developer site](#).