
Economic Dimension in the Ways of Life of the Seven Tribes of Bukidnon

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Abstract

This study on the Ways of Life of the Seven Tribes of Bukidnon focuses on the economic dimension, specifically on livelihood and income sources, livelihood assistance and opportunities afforded by the government, problems encountered relative to livelihood and their actual average monthly income. The author used descriptive method of research using semi-structured interviews as the primary approach. Follow-up clarifying interviews were also conducted which were carried out in a conversational style. Field notes were also written in conjunction with the interviews, observations and casual encounters with subjects. Results showed that the seven tribes have farming as their source of livelihood. Other sources of income include farm labor, peddling, weaving, among others. Of the seven only three received livelihood assistance. Although livelihood opportunities are available, lack of capital seems to be the main problem of the tribes. Their average monthly income is very low and not even enough for daily subsistence. Poverty apparently exists in every tribe of Bukidnon. However, there is still a great possibility for the return of self-sufficiency and self-reliance of the seven tribes of Bukidnon if the people's economic concern is addressed.

Keywords: economic dimension, livelihood, income sources, livelihood assistance

Introduction

Interest in the lifestyle and quality of indigenous people is sparked by the present administration's focus on poverty alleviation. Indigenous people groups are often marginalized from the mainstream of economic activities in the country, thus, explaining the high poverty incidence noted in this particular sector of the society. Economic marginalization is brought about by many factors foremost of which may be attributed to the groups' inability to access economic opportunities due to low education and cultural practices. Some of these factors can be directly addressed through government intervention while others may entail a whole new paradigm for the indigenous cultural groups.

Despite the presence of policies and programs for poverty reduction in the Philippines (Morales, 2004), poverty continues to be a significant development problem in the Philippines, particularly in rural areas. The post-Marcos administrations have sought to promote equitable economic growth to alleviate poverty, however, it has been disappointing in the Philippines compared with other Southeast Asian Countries. The World Bank attributes the contrasting poor performance of the Philippines to a number of factors, such as inability to sustain growth over long periods and persistent structural distortions in the economy.

When Corazon Aquino took over Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, her administration implemented several initiatives to liberalize the financial sector and promote rural growth. Some of these initiatives were as follows: the entry of new commercial banks and restrictions on establishing rural branches were lifted; the government departments were authorized to implement livelihood programs and projects; the nongovernment organizations (NGOs) were supported on their role; and the various tax and import incentives were introduced to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

In 1992, Fidel Ramos took over the leadership. In his time, a number of explicit poverty-reducing initiatives were implemented, focusing in particular on improved efficiency and targeting of services. The Ramos administration also created a “Presidential Commission to Fight Poverty”, which established major initiatives such as the Social Pact on credit in 1993 and the Social Reform Agenda in 1994. In 1997, microfinance became more prominent in the government’s poverty alleviation strategies.

When Joseph Estrada became president in 1998, his administration instituted the National Anti-Poverty Action Agenda (NAAA). Its major priorities were equitable and sustainable economic development, empowerment of the people, effective and efficient delivery of public goods and basic social services, and focused targeting.

The administration of Gloria Macagal-Arroyo in 2001 has its poverty agenda emphasizing free enterprise, modernized agriculture, and the disadvantaged sector. The primary program under this agenda is Kapit Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan (Hand-in-Hand Against Poverty) or KALAHI. This program focuses on the country’s poorest barangays and municipalities. KALAHI aims to channel a greater share

of the country’s resources to poor people and to develop their access to public services by increasing opportunities for participation in livelihood opportunities, redistributing land and credit resources, and expanding human development services.

An interesting study on the lifestyle of the Subanens, indigenous people of Zamboanga del Norte, revealed that their economic underdevelopment is largely due to their nomadic lifestyle (Bureros, 2010) and their adherence to a “hunt-and-consume” livelihood method. Men in this society search for food in the forest on a daily basis until resources are depleted and then, the entire family resettles in another area where resources are still abundant. While such a natural goal-directed economic practice may have worked in the past, the competition for very limited resources by the more sophisticated sector of the Philippine society effectively marginalized the Subanen tribe. Realizing this fact, the government tried to intervene through the enactment of Ancestral Domains (Indigenous People’s Rights Act, RA 8371, 1997) where all or portions of the land occupied by the indigenous groups are reserved for their own use.

Of the seven tribes in the province, only the Bukidnon tribe had been accorded their Ancestral Domain while the other six (6) tribes have yet to realize the promises of the IPRA (DENR-MKRN, 2012). Once an indigenous group is granted the right to use their ancestral domain, then the traditional nomadic economic activities can be replaced by more productive and sustainable livelihood engagements by the people.

Despite receiving priority under successive administrations and safety net programs, the IPs’ intended benefits were not fully realized; hence this study.

The present study aims to determine the economic dimension in the ways of life

of the seven hill tribes of Bukidnon: Bukidnon, Higaonon, Talaandig, Manobo, Matigsalog, Umayamnon and Tigwahanon. In particular, I looked into their livelihood and income sources, the livelihood assistance and opportunities afforded by the government, the problems they encountered relative to their livelihood and the actual average monthly income of these tribes. Lastly, I derived insights as to the reasons for the observed variations in the actual derived incomes of the tribes despite the livelihood opportunities and assistance afforded by the Philippine government.

Methodology

The descriptive method of research was used in this study to describe the economic dimension in the ways of life of the indigenous peoples (IPs) of Bukidnon using semi-structured interviews as the primary research approach. The recommendation of the Office of the Provincial Indigenous People's Affairs Commission was considered in identifying the locations of the seven ethnic hill tribes, as follows: (1) Dalwangan for Bukidnon; (2) Impasug-ong for Higaonon; (3) San Fernando for Tigwahanon; (4) Cabanglasan for Umayamnon; (5) Pigtauranan for Manobo; (6) Lantapan for Tala-andig; and (7) Sinuda for Matigsalog.

A total of 290 members of the tribe were interviewed. There were 51 Bukidnons, 29 Higaonons, 46 Tigwahanons, 32 Umayammons, 29 Manobos, 52 Talaandigs, and 51 Matigsalogs.

The *Bukidnon* tribe is a lowland people who have adapted the Christian ways and utilized modern technology living among Christians. This tribe is one of the largest of the seven tribes in Bukidnon.

The *Higaonon* tribe is identified as the most common tribe. Its members have

migrated to as far as Misamis Oriental and Agusan del Sur. They have remained peaceful as a people. Agriculture is their main source of income. However, they still practice their traditional dances and rituals wherever they are.

The *Tigwahanon* tribe lives along the Tigwa River and in the Tigwa-salug Valley. They are loud spoken people and are known as the traders among the Bukidnon tribes or ethnic groups.

The *Umayamnon* tribe, also known as Bukidnon Manobo, is highly nomadic with fine skills in beadwork and brass jewelry. This people live along the watershed of Umayam River. They are reserved and quite, fair skinned with prominent cheekbones and wear beaded turban without hair.

The *Manobos* are natives of the municipalities of Pangantucan, Kalilangan and Kadingilan. Others live in the municipalities of Don Carlos, Kitaotao, Kibawe, Quezon and Damulog. They speak a quaint archaic language of their own which cannot be understood by the lowland Bukidnon and other ethnic groups in the province.

The *Talaandig* tribe is from Talakag. The people started to call themselves as such when the Panamin (Presidential Assistant for National Minorities) took custody of them since September 18, 1975. The women of this tribe are expert embroiderers and patchwork makers. They have semi-settled mode of living.

The *Matigsalog* tribe is basically river people. They live along the Salug River in Kalangan, San Fernando, Bukidnon (Admin, 2008).

The interview process of these seven tribes started on October 11, 2011 and was completed on December 2, 2011. Before the questioning began, an IP ritual to drive away the evil spirits and to ask permission from the *Magbabaya* was done. The subject-respondents were then each given

a questionnaire. They answered the questions with the guidance of the researcher. These questions were as follows: (1) What is your main source of livelihood?; (2) What other source of income do you have?; (3) Do you have livelihood assistance from the government or from other agencies?; (4) What opportunities do you have in terms of your livelihood?; (5) Do you have problems regarding your livelihood?; and (6) How much is your income, in pesos, per month?

For every visit, that is, before letting them answer the questionnaire, a focus group discussion was conducted. A *datu* or a chieftain, the key informant, usually leads the group in answering the questions. For an effective communication an interpreter was aided by a key informant who can only speak their native language.

Follow-up clarifying interviews were also conducted. These were carried out in a conversational style. In addition, their leader talked about a variety of topics throughout an extended interview. Field notes were also written in conjunction with the interviews, observations and casual encounters with subjects.

Results and Discussion

The result of the study is presented in Matrix A. The matrix shows the economic dimension in the ways of life of the seven tribes of Bukidnon.

Bukidnon Tribe of Dalwangan. The Bukidnon Tribe in Dalwangan, being a lowlander people, has farming as their most important economic activity; has adapted the Christian ways; and has utilized modern technology as they coexist with Christians. Their main source of income is farm labor. This is probably because of the presence of big companies, like San Miguel Corporation (SMC): Monterey, Magnolia, and Purefoods; and Del Monte Philippines Inc. pineapple

plantation which hire workers in the locality. If they are given more training and seminars, their skills in making geometric designs on their bags, mats and baskets may be enhanced, thus giving them the potential to raise their monthly income.

Higaonon Tribe of Impasug-ong. The Higaonon tribe has migrated to other places, but a number of them settled in Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. They raise upland rice, root crops and different types of vegetables. They also practice settled agriculture, using high-yielding varieties of rice and corn. They are dependent on subsistence farming by slash-and-burn. Money is generated from the sales of excess agricultural products, rattan-made backpack and kamuyot. Another livelihood opportunity is employment in the government offices. Sometimes, others leave the community to do some peddling and to seek work as domestic helpers in the nearby towns. They also sell brooms made of *guiyong* for additional income. Their livelihood problem is financial as evidenced by their low average monthly income.

Talaandig Tribe of Lantapan. The Talaandig tribe of Lantapan is from Talakag. Their source of livelihood is farming. They practice the sustainable farming system, hunt, gather food, embroider and do other forms of livelihood activities. The Talaandigs are semi-settled agriculturalists in the uplands. The traditional crops of the Talaandig include corn, rice, root crops, abaca and banana. These crops are usually produced at consumption levels only. This subsistence level economy is supplemented by raising chickens, pigs and other livestock. The Talaandig used to practice a traditional rotation method of farming. But this practice has changed after logging was introduced in the community in the 1970s. Although some still practice rotational upland farming, others have embarked on

Matrix A

Economic Dimension in the Ways of Life of the Seven Tribes of Bukidnon

Tribes	Source of Livelihood	Source of Income	Livelihood Assistance	Livelihood Opportunities	Livelihood problems	Average Monthly Income
Bukidnon (Dalwangan)	Farming	Farm Labor	No	Training & Seminar	No capital	776.57
Higaonon (Impasug-ong)	Farming	Peddling	No	Financial	No capital	1,162.07
Talaandig (Lantapan)	Farming	Others	No	Financial	No capital	1,258.82
Manobo (Pigtauranan)	Farming	Others	Yes	Financial	No capital	1,867.85
Matigsalug (Sinuda)	Farming	Peddling & Others	No	Financial	No capital	1,666.96
Tigwahanon (San Fernando)	Farming	Others	Yes	Financial	No capital	2,718.18
Umayamnon (Cabanglasan)	Farming	Weaving	Yes	Financial	No capital	1,763.64

high-value crop production for the market. Some of them still hunt wild animals and gather honey which they sell to lowlanders. If given a capital, they can sell or barter more woven handicrafts.

Manobo Tribe of Pigtauranan. These are natives of Pigtauranan in Pangantucan. This tribe hunts not for themselves, but for the village, with equal sharing in the tribe. The *Manobos* grow corn and rice as their principal crops. They were given livelihood assistance from the government. Livelihood opportunities are present, however, they need more capital to avail of it. Their monthly income is not sufficient to start a livelihood project.

Matigsalug Tribe of Sinuda. In earlier years, the Matigsalug practiced a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle with minimal

agricultural efforts. However, at present their main source of livelihood is farming with peddling as their other source of income. Receiving no assistance from the government, they had thought of going into some livelihood projects. But due to financial need or no capital to start with such endeavor they remain to be poor.

Tigwahanon Tribe of San Fernando. The Tigwahanons are located in the hinterland areas where there is an influx of rebel groups. Due to the peace and order condition in their area, they settle down near the poblacion of San Fernando leaving behind their farm which is their main source of livelihood. They are forced to work as farm laborers with minimal wage. Financial problem hinders them from doing livelihood projects.

Umayamnon Tribe of Cabanglasan. The Umayamnon tribe has skills in beadwork and brass jewelry which they use for their body accessories. As modernization approaches and as a result of the eco-tourism project of the *Garden's of Malasag*, some of the *Umayamnon Tribes* migrated to the said eco-tourism village. It helps them through the livelihood project such as handicrafts. The Umayamnon in Cabanglasan have farming as their main source of livelihood with weaving as their source of income. Although they received financial assistance, they are still financially incapable of enhancing their skill in making *kamuyot* and *banig*.

Looking into the source of livelihood, the seven tribes solely depend on small-scale farming. This finding is supported by the Tourism Office of Bukidnon (2008) when it reported that more than 95% of Bukidnon population live on farming. They just vary on their source of income. Some are engaged in peddling, weaving and farm labor. Although the Manobos, Tigwahanons and the Umayamnons received financial assistance from the government, they still need financial aid from the government to start on their livelihood projects. This concern needs to be addressed because according to the report of Cariño (2009), the IP's ability to participate fully in the sustainable development practices on their lands has tended to be limited. Of the seven tribes, the Tigwahanons in San Fernando have higher average monthly income but this income is still below the poverty line.

Conclusions

Poverty is apparent in every tribe or ethnic group of Bukidnon. Dependence on traditional farming and low levels of economic growth has worsened in recent times. However, they aspire to have more income to provide for basic household needs. For more production, related facilities are

needed and identification of market for farm produce is a necessity. More trainings and seminars on livelihood are needed to raise the income level of the tribes. The observed variations in the actual derived incomes despite the livelihood opportunities and assistance provided by the Philippine Government can still be addressed. There is still a great possibility for the return of self-sufficiency and self-reliance of the seven tribes of Bukidnon.

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