

Strategies in the Utilization and Management of Resources among a Group of Mandaya's in Davao Oriental

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Abstract

The study examined the changes, if any, in the strategies employed by a group of Mandaya's in Calapagan, Lupon and in Sitio Taganilao, Tamisan, Mati - both in Davao Oriental - in upland farming and in resource utilization and management years after their integration into the mainstream of Philippine society. It also aimed to find out if this group continued their ancestors' practice of using the areas' plants with curative effect or medicinal value in the light of advances in the field of medicine. Findings suggest that, like other Philippine indigenous groups, this group of Mandaya's has been affected by its contact with lowlanders. The depletion in the quantity of the products regularly churned out by the forests, the seas, and the rivers due to man's exploitation of the earth's natural resources has changed them from being self-reliant to dependent consumers of the goods produced by the market economy. Their age-old farming practice, though, survives to some degree; a change is evident in that they are now given the opportunity to participate in the protection and conservation of the forests through the integrated social forestry project. Plants identified as having curative or medicinal value are still widely used by the members of the group.

Keywords: sustainable, swidden farming, resource utilization, indigenous knowledge, cultural minority, Philippine indigenous group

Introduction

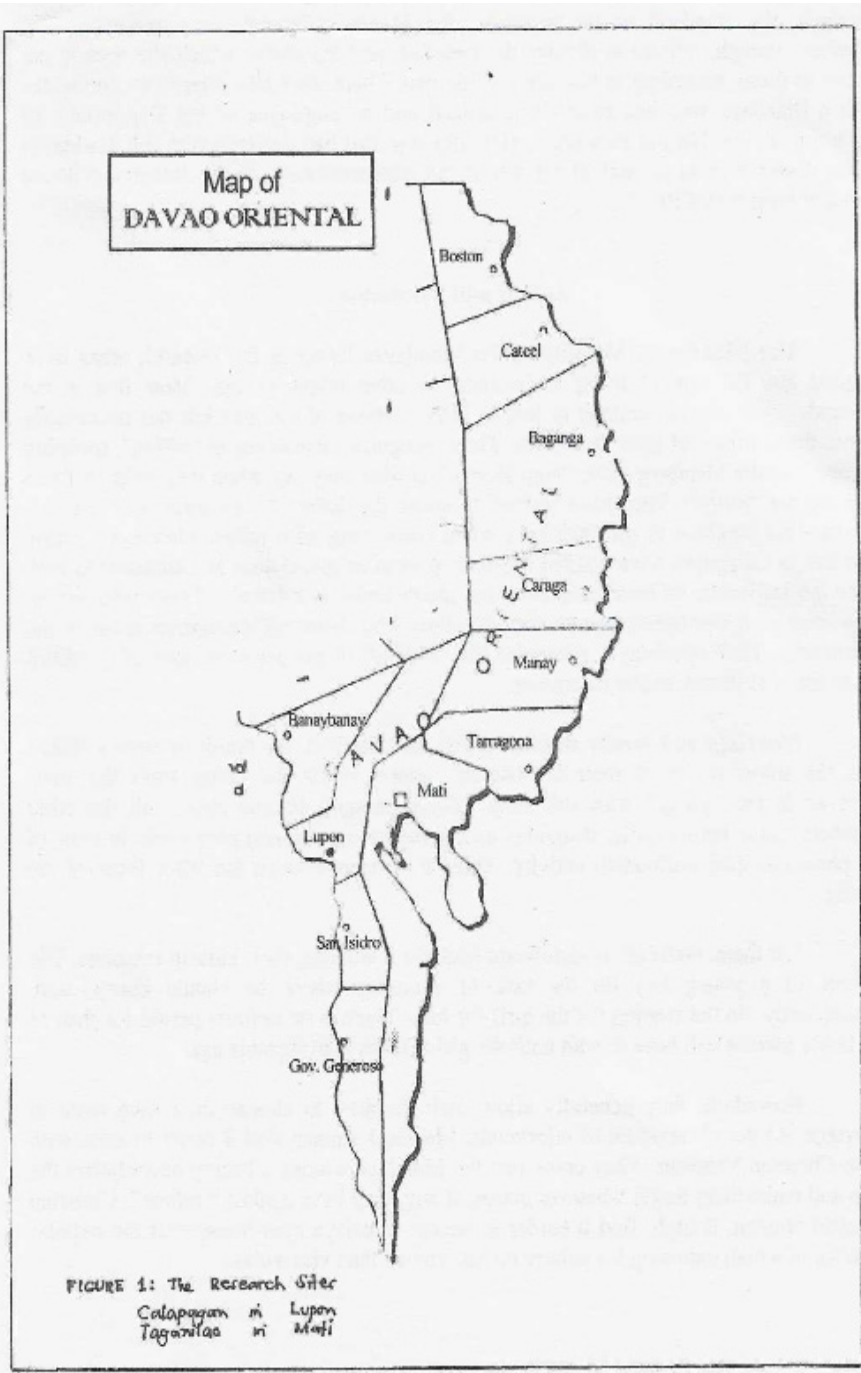
"Mandaya" is derived from the word's "man" meaning "first" and "daya" meaning "upstream" or "upper portion" of a river, and therefore means the "first people upstream" (Valderrama, 1987). It refers to groups of people found along the mountain ranges of Davao Oriental. Out of the province's eleven (11) municipalities, six (6) have a population of more than twenty percent (20 %) Mandaya highlanders, namely: Boston, Cateel, Baganga, Caraga, Manay, and Tarragona (CCP, 1994). This group is also found in the towns of New Bataan and Compostela in Compostela Valley. In recent years, they have started to dwell in towns and lowland areas. They live with Muslims and/or Christian Visayans who migrated, and continue to migrate, in large numbers to Mindanao. Their constant association with lowlanders effected

assimilation. What started as an association between a Mandaya who had gone to barrios and towns to barter or to sell their farm products and a Visayan who also had his own goods to offer or exchange for had led to the lessening of cultural differences through friendships and, in most cases, marriage. They started to let their children go to school, mingle with the Christians, dress like them, and some even let their children adopt the Christian faith. It is a fact, though, that some who continue to dwell in the mountain ranges, hills and valleys are illiterate because of their distance from the schoolhouses. Those in the lowland are usually literate, and are far ahead in terms of educational achievement and socio-economic status. A number of these literate Mandayas have developed feelings of superiority and illiterate Mandayas have developed feelings of inferiority (Valderrama, 1987)-

The migration of the lowlanders into their turf has led to their displacement from their lands, or if not, has led to their being outnumbered by these lowlanders in areas they considered as their turf. Nevertheless, they have learned to associate with, and adopt the practices of, the Christianized Visayans. Nowadays, it is common for a Mandaya to wear clothes resembling the lowlanders”; to bedeck himself with adornments not usually associated with a Mandaya; to speak the language of the lowlanders even if he continues to speak his own dialect, etc. Their adoption of the lowlanders” practices is such that it is considered of great interest to researchers to find out if this has also influenced their practice of swidden farming.

Materials and Methods

This research made use of published studies on Mandaya culture and of personal interviews with Mandayas who occupy important positions in the communities of Taganilao (in Barangay Tamisan in Mati) and Calapagan, Lupon (Figure 1) and/or who lived through the time when the Mandayas first arrived in the areas. The areas were chosen after consultation with the Office of Southern Cultural Communities in Mati, Davao Oriental and after ocular inspection by the Director of Projects of the Research Institute for Mindanao Culture (RIMCU) - the proponent of the study.



The farming areas were visited and photographed. Interviews with the tribal chieftain, the “*baylan*” or the priestess, the Mandaya farmers were recorded. The “*baylan*”, though, refused to divulge the materials and the chants which she uses in her rituals as these, according to her, are confidential. There were also interviews conducted with a Mandaya who had been Christianized and an employee of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) who had had dealings with the Mandayas in the research areas as part of his job in the implementation of the Integrated Social Forestry Project (ISFP).

Results and Discussion

The Mandayas. Majority of the Mandayas living in the research areas have adapted into the way of living maintained by other ethnic groups. Most live in the lowlands while others continue to live in hilly portions of the area but not necessarily within the confines of their farmlands. They recognize themselves as “*nitibo*”, meaning members of the Mandaya tribe; “*mga Bisaya*” is what they say when they refer to those who are not “*nitibo*”. They have learned to speak the dialect of the areas they live in Bisaya - but continue to use their own when conversing with fellow Mandayas- Those who live in Calapagan have bonded together to form an association and continue to look up to the leadership of their chieftain who, incidentally, is a female, Those who live in Sitio Taganilao live harmoniously with Muslims who, however, outnumber them in the community. They continue to recognize the “*balyan*” or the priestess; they still consult her in times of illness and/or calamities.

Marriage and family structure. For the Mandaya, the family is closely linked with the sustainability of their subsistence pattern. While the father leads the work involved in the “*garas*” with able help from sons aged 10 and above, all the other members of the family (wife, daughters and, sometimes, relatives) play a role in most of the phases in their cultivation activity. Thus, it is dependent on the labor force of the family.

For them, marriage is significant because it enlarges their kinship relations. The parents of a young boy do the task of choosing whom he should marry, and, consequently, do the wooing (of the girl) for him. There is no definite period for this, as the boy's parents will have to wait until the girl reaches marriageable age.

Nowadays, they generally allow their children to choose their own mate in marriage. As per observation of informants, Mandaya women find it easier to mate with male Christian Visayans. They opine that the Mandaya women's beauty overwhelms the men and make them forget whatever biases, if any, they have against “*nitibos*”. Christian Visayan women, though, find it harder to accept Mandaya men because of the popular practice of a man imposing his culture on his woman than vice-versa.

The newlyweds stay with the groom's family. They are given material assistance. When their family enlarges, they build their own house and thus, live on

their own to raise their children.

In their culture, polygyny is a practice. A man can have as many wives as he can afford to feed and shelter, but a woman cannot have another husband. The first wife, though, receives a more lavish preparation than the others that follow. She also has the least work and is, in fact, assisted by the other wives in her chores.

Roles and status of husband and wife. Their roles are defined in terms of their participation in the subsistence activities, and in the manner of running their household and raising their children. The husband provides his wife/wives a farm lot. he attends to the choice and the preparation of the farmland. Tasks which demand a higher amount of physical effort and energy are assigned to him. these tasks include cutting and burning big trees and fetching water. He is expected to pass on his knowledge on farming, hunting and fishing to his sons. The wife, on the other hand, helps her husband in the farm. She pulls out the weeds, plants the crops, and helps in the harvest of their crops. She helps her husband decide on the quantity to be kept for the family's consumption. She handles all the household chores, until such time that her daughters reach an age when they could already learn and thus, help in the chores in the house and in the farm.

Subsistence agriculture. Swidden cultivation or shifting agriculture was the main source of subsistence among the Mandayas. From interviews with informants, it was learned that their ancestors went through a cultivation pattern which they have adopted with little modification because of their contact with lowlanders. In most cases, the Mandayas start to clear their fields only after the appearance of the seven stars known as "*payo-payo*" in November. By December, when the "*payo-payo*" are directly above the sky, it is time to plant (Bagani, 1980).

The husband, as the head of the family, starts the "bitas" or choosing the site; clearing it is called "ka-tres na sakop", "ka-kuwatro", "ka-lima na sakop" or third, fourth, fifth moonless nights (Valderrama, 1987). The phases in the farm cycle which they routinely follow are:

1. "*Garas*". The husband leads the task of cutting shrubs and weeds before the big trees. Sons who are ten years old and above join him. The "aoyon" or "bayanihan" is shown in the assistance of the relatives and some neighbors - the latter upon invitation.
2. "*Pila*". A "huwasay" or axe is used by the men to cut down the big trees. The immediate cutting of the branches into pieces -" tadtad" - follows. Branches, leaves, and logs are left to dry.
3. "*Pawa*". The scattered leaves, branches and logs are piled and burned by the father and his sons.
4. "*Labon*". The wife and her daughters aged ten and above pull off the

weeds or cut down the remaining grass or shrubs.

5. "*Hasok*". This is the task of planting the seeds, usually during the last quarter of the moon because it usually rains, which makes the soil soft and hastens the sprouting of the seed. To dig a hole, a "*lugdakaf*" (a sharp, pointed bamboo pole) is thrust into the ground. Seeds are then dropped into the hole by the wife and/or her daughters. Intercropping or "*pasubot*" of sweet potato is done when the "*bingki*" or seeds grow unevenly. "*Wakag*" or taro (*gabi*) is planted in areas where the charcoal of the logs is left.
6. "*Hawan*". Women pull the young weeds growing around the plants. They usually use their bare hands if the soil is loose and soft (Valderrama, 1987).
7. "*Gani*". The start of the harvesting, "*danggis*", is done in the afternoon. A "*balyan*" (or "*baylan*") or priestess is invited for the "*panawag-tawag*". To Hakiadon, the spirit of harvest, is offered the thanksgiving of the landowner. Food is offered to the harvesters who are present. The "*mayas*" (*rice birds*) are also offered food which is placed on taro leaves left in the field. They use their bare hands in harvesting. They thresh by stepping on the heap and doing some sort of dancing movement (Valderrama, 1987).

It is worth noting that despite the introduction of fertilizers, the informants have opted not to use such as their old practice of just letting their crops grow "naturally" have resulted in good harvest. To guard against the "*maya*" (rice bird), they construct a "*lagkaw*" or a small hut where someone will keep watch, and a can to drive the rice bird away if it comes. They deal with a rat that harms their crop by catching it and talking to it, with the explanation of why it was caught and the promise that it will get a share of the crop come harvest time.

Relatives and friends who help in the harvest are given their share afterwards. Food is prepared and shared with everyone present ("*pagsaulog*"). The rest of the crops are kept in a "*limot*" - a container made from the bark of a tree - which are in turn placed inside a "*puol*" or a hut for the crops.

Cultivated plants. The Mandayas' staple food consist of corn, sweet potato, and rice. Corn is the most commonly cultivated plant in both Mati and Lupon towns. Sweet potato is planted anytime of the year, along with bananas and taro ("*wakag*").

Intercropping is practiced. Sweet potato and taro are planted along with rice and com, although not as extensively as they used to. The same is true with cassava. They have also resorted to planting coconut and coffee.

Plants identified as having curative or medicinal values. There are some plants which are used for medicinal purposes by the Mandayas. These are recognized for their curative effect and are still in use despite the introduction of modern medicine.

Some of the plants identified, and the way these are prepared and for what illness, are as follows:

“*Tuba-tuba*” (*Jatropha gossypifolia*) - its leaves are useful for stomach trouble.

Coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) - its bark is used to stop bleeding.

Pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) - decoction of its leaves is a remedy for an irregular flow of menstruation.

“*Tanglad*” (*Androgen citratus* DC StapD , kawayan and gabi (*Colocasia esculenia*) - decoction of its leaves is believed to be a remedy for high blood pressure

“*Acacia*” (*Samanea saman*) - its leaves, when boiled, are believed to cure kidney trouble

“*Malunggay*” (*Moringa oleifera* lam) - a portion of its bark is grated and then mixed with its leaves- These are then pounded and applied on the wound.

“*Makahiya*” or “*Hibi-hibi*” (*Mimosa pudica*) - a decoction of its leaves is a remedy for an irregular flow of menstruation

“*Arbobuena*” (*Mentha cordifolia* Opiz) - a decoction of its leaves, mixed with a small amount of “land” (oil) will soothe sore eyes.

“*Cebucaon*” tree - a portion of its bark is boiled, drunk thrice a day in order to increase the fertility of men and women

“*Panyawan*” - a decoction of its leaves is a cure for stomachache

“*Sacate*” - its leaves, pounded, as remedy for an irregular menstrual flow

Cultivation tools and the use of draft animals. The Mandayas in the area do not own draft animals. For their slash-and-burn system, crude tools are used. The “*huwasay*” or axe is used for felling big trees. The “*kakand*” or bolo is of two kinds: the “*takos*” which is a single-bladed bolo for cutting shrubs, branches of frees and firewood, and the “*gorgallas*” which is a native trowel, or “*guna*” to the Cebuano, for pulverizing the soil or uprooting the weeds. The “*bingkong*” (a hoe-like tool) is used to dig up cogon roots, other weeds and shrubs (Valderrama, 1987)- Horses are present but these are not utilized for farm work; rather, these are used as a means for transporting goods.

Fishing as a means of livelihood. The Mandayas who live in Taganilao thrive on fishing as their main source of livelihood (complemented by farming for some). They have learned to adopt the lowlanders’ practices in fishing particularly “*baling*”, “*pukoi*” and “*bubu*” Some of them go out fishing by themselves while others opt to be part of the crew of big fishing boats and earn a portion of the total value of the catch. Those in Calapagan have ceased to engage in fishing as the rivers from which

they used to catch freshwater fish and shrimps no longer yield such. They attribute this to the pollution of the river which was brought about by the influx of people in the area

Their ancestors engaged in fishing with the use of the following:

1. “*Kawad*”. Uses the hook - and - line device with earthworm for its bait.
2. “*Tugbukan*”. A small spear used to hit the eel and other big fishes.
3. “*Tangi*”. A cylinder-shaped device made of bamboo used to catch shrimps.
4. “*Tubli*”. A plant whose roots are pounded and squeezed, then poured on the water to stupefy the fish, thus causing it to float on the surface for oxygen.
5. “*Sabong*”. A fish trap made of bamboo slats intertwined and fastened together by rattan strips.
6. “*Paubas*”. River/stream draining which requires cooperative effort to divert the water flow of the stream or river (Valderrama, 1987).

Some species of freshwater animals known to thrive in the streams and rivers are the following: “*banak*” (mullet), “*sawog*” (grant mullet), “*kagang*” (crabs), “*tagabutay*” (mountain dweller shrimps), “*putian*” (white shrimps), and “*kasili*” (eel).

System of production and division of labor. The family is the unit of subsistence activities. With the exception of the period of felling down big trees and of harvesting crops wherein other members of the community participate, the cultivation process is an activity of the Mandaya family. What used to be a production mainly for the purpose of consumption has extended to include production for the purpose of selling to lowlanders, particularly in downtown Mati, Davao Oriental.

The division of labor in farm work is determined by age and sex. There are members of the community who specialize in certain industries. Rope-making, basketmaking, “*nigo*”- making, “*dagmay*” - weaving, among others, are resorted to by the Mandayas in various parts of the province. The weaving of “*dagmay*” is common in Caraga town and is an industry which the Mandayas have become famous for.

Concepts of property. For the Mandayas in the area, land is highly valued. They established ownership of their land through a concept of “whoever cleared the piece of land and cultivated it is the owner of that land”. Documents purportedly proving ownership of a piece of land were alien to their ancestors. Thus, it was understandable that they harbored resentment against Visayans who presented themselves as owners of the lands cultivated by the Mandayas because of a land title from a government office. This became a source of conflict between them and continues up to this day, although not with any accompanying violence.

Diet composition and eating habits. There has been a change in the everyday diet of a Mandaya. In the past, his diet consisted of rice or, if none, “*wakag*” (taro), sweet potato, “*ugbos sa wakug*” (taro leaves), and /or whatever meat could be had in a day. Nowadays, root crops are seldom, if ever, part of his diet. With this proximity to the seas, it is but natural that he partakes of fish and other fishery products. Pork is not a daily part of their diet because of unavailability in most days of the week. Chicken is much more common - if they could afford it-as everyday food consist of rice, fish, vegetables, salted fish, and some fruit. As with other groups, meals are served and eaten thrice in a day.

A lot of fruit trees grow in the area which they obtain fruits from. These include jackfruit, mango, guava, makopa, lanzones, durian, avocado, and rambutan. The “*kurigsao*” tree (“*mama*”) is valued, as well as the lauan and falcatta trees. Vegetables are grown, like “*kabay*” (*beans*), eggplant, garbanzos, and the like.

Conclusions

Here, then, is an example of a cultural group that has seen the influence, and the effect of its contact with lowlanders. Prolonged exposure to these lowlanders’ culture has contributed to the modification of some of their age-old practices. The effects on their manner of dressing, language, recognition of leadership, religion, and the like, are obvious. Their traditional farming - the slash and burn method - continues to survive. This despite the adverse reaction from some sectors about the ecological soundness of their farming practice.

The depletion in the quantity of the products that are churned out by the forest, the seas and the rivers has not gone unnoticed. Logging activities in the areas led to an upbeat economy but had also caused the denudation of the forest to such an extent that the area had to be replanted ten years ago to halt the denudation. With the realization that it would be very difficult to wean the Mandaya away from their age-old farming practice despite threats of arrest, the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) opted to regulate their practice. With the Integrated Social Forestry Project, they are now given a Certificate of Stewardship Contract (CSC) for twenty-five years which requires them to plant the farm lot with trees, a staple crop or to raise livestock, with the technical assistance of the Agriculture Department. Thus, there is now a recognition of, and respect for, their practice with the opportunity to become partners in the protection and conservation of the forest.

The sea, streams, and rivers which were some of the traditional sources of food and of water for their crops have also been adversely affected as shown by the dwindling number of aquatic products brought about by the introduction of toxic substances as a speedy method of catching fish. They were thus forced to depend on the market for their needs for fish and to content themselves with an occasional catch from these bodies of water.

This group has taken steps to cope with the changes brought by the influx of other ethnic groups into the spot which they initially considered as theirs to take care of. Their ancient concept that “we do not own the land we till; we are simply stewards of something which is owned by a supreme being” was challenged by the arrival of people brandishing pieces of paper (land titles, actually) as proof of their legal ownership of the land. Others chose to fight, while others simply left to find other pieces of land to clear and to cultivate.

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