

# INTER-GROUP RESOURCE USE PATTERNS IN TWO UPLAND COMMUNITIES IN NEGROS ORIENTAL

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## Introduction

One of the inherent processes of populating the upland areas in the Philippines today is the continuing upward migration of lowlanders looking for farmland. Considering the limited capability of the highlanders to absorb additional people due to its marginal topographic and land characteristics, the process can easily bring economic tragedy to all people who attempt to make a living in this zone.

On the basis of the type of highland settlers in the 1920s, two types of communities can in turn be recognized in the Negros Oriental highlands. One such community is largely of the Malayan type. This comprised the lowland Christians who by necessity were forced to leave the crowded lowlands in search for land to cultivate. In the 1920s, they composed the pioneer population in these highland communities.

Some of these migrants, however, have small parcels of land in the plains which are too small for their families. Nonetheless, these lots were planted to permanent crops like coconut and bananas so they did not need constant cultivation by the owner. This gave them the time to migrate without necessarily neglecting their lowland farms.

The other type of communities comprises those whose (past and present) members are indigenous native upland populations like the Bukidnons or the Negritos. They are forced to stay in their present upland communities since they have no more forest land to retreat at the time when they were crowded out by the migrating lowland population.

In these highland communities, small clusters of Negrito villages exist virtually in the midst of a large number of lowland migrant Cebuano farmers.

This study investigates the patterns of resource use process among social aggregates in two upland communities of Negros Oriental. It will explore the usual practices and behavior by which ethnic groups allocate to, and between themselves the resources available in these areas. In the process, implications toward upland development will be delineated.

The community typified by the upland migrants is represented by the farm villages around the Lake Balinsasayao area. The place is around 20-25 kilometers northwest of Dumaguete City whose center has the following coordinates: 123°10' east longitude and 9°21' north longitude. It has an elevation between 600 to 1,500 meters above sea level. At present, only around 20 to 30% of its forest cover can be considered as primary forest and the rest, secondary.

The other highland community type is represented by the indigenous native Negrito population found in Barangay Cangguhub, Mabinay, Negros Oriental. This is around 70 kilometers north of Dumaguete City. Its center has the following coordinates: 122°70' east longitude and 9°39' north latitude. It is approximately 300 to 500 meters above sea level. Unlike the Lake Balinsasayao area, Cangguhub has virtually no forest cover. The primary forests were cut down long time ago and they are now replaced with shrubby vegetation that can be cleared by use of garden trowel.

### Ethnic Groups In Two Communities

The Lake Balinsasayao and Cangguhub areas differ in composition of population groups that inhabit and utilize resources in the localities.

*The Lake Balinsasayao Area*

Occupants of the Lake Balinsasayao area are of Malayan type of population who were migrants from the lowland communities. They occupied the site as early as the 1920s. Oral reports by the oldest occupants indicated no other ethnic groups (like Bukidnon or Negrito) found in this site during the initial period of the lowland migrants to the area.

From the 1920s on, lowland migrants continued to occupy the sites. They came from the neighboring lowland municipalities like San Jose, Sibulan and Valencia (see Map 1). Movement to the area continued to intensify in the 1930s but declined during the war years (Second World War), for obvious reasons.

In the 1950s, when the war was over, migration upsurge took place again. This continued to rise in the 60s and in the 70s. However, it sharply declined in the 1980s (see Figure 1). With the controls imposed on new clearings in the highlands, migration to the upland for permanent settlement has stabilized. The upsurge of migrants had been noted since most of the upland areas ideal for cultivation had already been taken. In 1987, an increase in forest clearings was noted but these forest clearing activities were caused by absentee occupants who seek opportunities for land expansion only.

Thus, for distinction, the Lake Balinsasayao occupants can now be aptly called upland dwellers. They constitute one social aggregate controlling and utilizing the upland resources of Lake Balinsasayao.

Lake Balinsasayao, however, is not a closed community. The upland dwellers freely move between their lowland habitat to the upland zone to utilize some of the agricultural products in the uplands. The lowland dwellers then constitute another social aggregate in the uplands.

They cannot be distinguished as ethnic groups, but rather two distinct social aggrupations inhabiting two different spatial locations and utilizing the same resources in the upland. Thus the distinction of upland and lowland dwellers is practical in the Lake Balinsasayao condition.

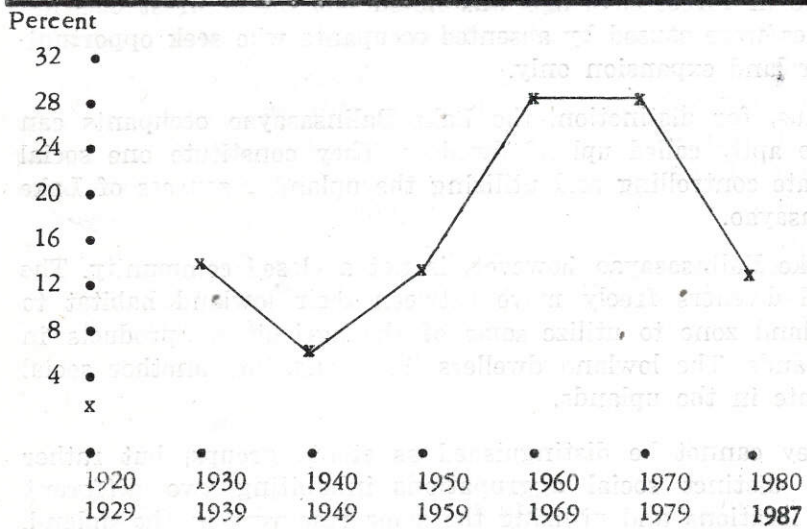
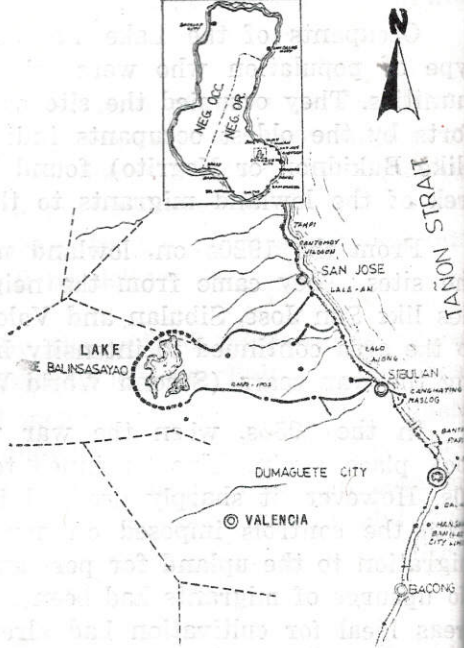
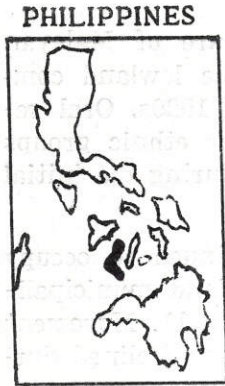


Figure 1

Trend of In-Migration Flow To Lake Balinsasayao Area

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## The Cangguhub Area

Unlike the Lake Balinsasayao area, Cangguhub provides a social setting where two distinct ethnic groups occupy the same community. These are the Negritos and the Cebuanos.

The Negritos are the earliest occupants of the area, whose traditional technology included hunting, collecting and fishing. They are known to be one of the aborigines of the country who first occupied the lowland portions of most parts of the country during the early times. When Negros Island was first reached by the Spaniards, the short dark skinned and kinky haired people were found living close to the mouths of the rivers along the coast. The Negritos of Cangguhub descended from this group who tried to maintain their foraging technology whenever opportunities allowed them to do so.

The Negritos in Cangguhub are the last stock of the first occupants of Negros Oriental. They have occupied an area which hopefully should have been controlled by them if they did not gradually lose their ethnic identity caused by intermarriage and cultural assimilation with another ethnic group, the Cebuanos.

The Cebuanos descended from the Malayan stock inhabiting the coastal towns of Negros Oriental and the southwestern coastal towns of the island of Cebu. The present group came to Cangguhub as settlers who had been displaced from their own localities by the extreme demographic pressure on land resources. As they move closer to the Negrito communities, they continue to maintain their technical skills in farming and lifestyle.

Physically, the two groups can easily be distinguished in the community. Culturally, there are tremendous overlaps of their cultural items and traits caused by intensive cultural borrowing.

## Social Relations and Economic Transactions

Ethnicity has been largely defined on the basis of language and sociocultural differences. Over the years, as a result of genetic crossings through intermarriage and cultural borrowing,

these criteria for ethnic group differentiation have proven themselves to be already irrelevant. Individuals who used to be differentiated as among from a distinct group now speak the language and follow the lifestyle of another. In short, these groups no longer distinguish themselves as peculiar social units in their own communities. They represent a continuum of social units who share the same traits and characteristics.

Similar phenomenon seems to prevail between individuals coming from the same ethnic groups but occupying different ecozones. Under this condition, the individuals coming from these ecozones may differ in some few specific technologies but share common sociocultural practices.

Hence, they form social aggregates or groups. As social aggregates or groups, they do not exist in a social vacuum. They represent a continuous social unit undergoing various social processes.

These processes take various forms: complementarity; competition; accommodation and subordination. The concern of each of these processes is to provide, under a protractive basis, the chances of each group to service.

### *Complementarity*

When two or more groups are in contact, chances are that they may possess different technical skills and differentiated access to resources. Each group desires for a maximum option the use of resources and enjoyment as well as other opportunities available. This can be achieved in a number of ways. One common social process taking place among the uplanders and lowlanders in the Lake Balinsasayao area and the Negritos and the Cebuanos in Cangguhub is through complementarity.

Complementarity is a social process whereby conditions, sources and opportunities of different levels are made available to individuals coming from different groups. The philosophy that resources, goods or technology that are not available to

individual can be made accessible to him from other groups via one's own resources. This is possible since individuals may have different demands for resources that are in the hands of different social units.

One such demand for example is a *banca* (canoe) dug-out from logs usually provided by uplanders to the lowlanders. The Lake Balinsasayao farmers have the technology in making dug-out *banca* and they have access to a preferred tree species.

On the other hand, cash is a very scarce resource in the upland. While it is true that cash can be obtained from sale of their own farm products, this type of conversion is not always looked upon with favor. They need to have a constant supply of very essential staple food for their household. In the complementarity procedure, such contractor tries to get a better deal in terms of benefit returns. *Banca* construction skill is quite rare. Hence, the return from this job is generally higher than that of the sale of farm products. Given the option for obtaining cash, the former is preferred. The lowlanders who have the cash and the need for the *banca* would generally ask the uplanders to make it for them for various reasons. While it is true that the lowlanders may be able to construct their *banca* in the forest by themselves, a number of constraints would favor hiring as the more advantages:

First, the lowlanders will spend more man-hour efforts in travelling from their residence to the site of construction. In the cost analysis, the *banca* may cost higher.

Second, they are exposing themselves to more forest risks and hazards in an unfamiliar forest environment.

Third, they may run the risk of being exposed to the legal authorities since the lowlanders are intruding into a forest zone which the uplanders have the control.

On the other hand, among the Negritos and the Cebuanos, complementarity largely happens within the realm of farm management. In Cangguhub, the Negritos and the Cebuanos occupy

the same land terrain. It is rolling characterized by small valleys with good soils and rolling hillsides largely covered with limestone rocks. In the catchment or valley areas, soils are excellent which can be plowed. On the rolling hillsides, plowing is an impossible medium for cultivation. Hence, human labor is imperative.

Under this context, complementarity has been pursued by the Negritos and the Cebuanos. The Cebuanos have an edge over the Negritos in that the former have succeeded in keeping their own draft animal. The Negritos until now do not own any work animals. As a consequence, the Cebuanos have their work animals in addition to human labor which is not true among the Negritos.

The Negritos claim that farms prepared by plowing always produce better than those prepared by human labor alone. Hence they always prefer to have their fields in catchment or valley plowed. The Cebuanos provide plowing services for some Negritos to plots in exchange for Negrito labor in cultivating their hillside farms which are hard to plow.

Since the Cebuanos have plots that cannot be plowed, they ask the Negritos to do the cultivation of these particular plots. In time of farm preparation, the Cebuano household labor supply is usually insufficient, hence the need for the Negritos' help.

The complementing process in the provision of goods and services has a number of adaptive functions to the transacting social aggregates. The process allows the Balinsasayao uplanders to obtain cash without selling their subsistence crops. On the other hand, the lowlanders get the goods they need at a low actual price with no risks.

For the Negritos, the system allows them to produce high yield by tapping the Cebuanos' plowing services. On the other hand, the Cebuanos noted that cultivating their farms that cannot be plowed becomes less difficult with the Negritos labor. The benefits received are equal. At the same time, the sociocultural and ecological fitness of both population groups improve.



*Subordination*

Subordination is a process by which a particular group serves the other with a lesser return. In short, there is a subordinate-superior relationship. Normally, the arrangement is voluntary since there is a pressing need for both ends to establish the relationship.

Under this setup, two types of resources are involved. One is the resource base of the potential subordinate (labor) and the other is that emanating from the potential superior (job opportunity). This is usually represented by single men and women working as household help.

During the months of food scarcity (usually taking place during summer or from February to May), upland households generally try to improve its food supply level by sending away working age individuals to work in the lowlands. The latter contribute to the household coffers regularly, through remittances.

The uplanders from the Lake Balinsasayao area seasonally send young girls in the labor force to the lowland, like in the coastal municipalities of Sibulan and San Jose, to serve as household help of the lowlanders. The lowlanders generally determine the monthly rate of the workers depending on their capability.

Similar process is happening among the Negritos. However, this is only true among the working age females. The females have developed an aggressive attitude toward working outside their communities as household help for the Cebuanos. The females generally work for wage labor in the farms of their neighboring Cebuano households only. This practice generally intensifies during the months of food scarcity.

The lowlanders and the Cebuanos in these two communities provide free board and lodging for the workers. During the harvest time, the workers go back to the upland communities and assist in the harvesting of their respective household's farm.

Since these people have already established their link with the Cebuanos and the lowlanders, looking for possible employers during the next cycle of famine is not much of a problem. Hence,

this process becomes a cycle. This arrangement however, is now producing some problems for the employer as we will see later in this paper.

The system has a significant impact when it comes to adjustment. Through the process of subordination, the uplander and the Negritos are able to reduce the demographic pressure on their respective household's food supply temporarily. During lean months, they obtain additional income to supplement the limited food resources in the households. However, since the demand for this job opportunity is greater on the side of the potential subordinates, they do not have any say on the wage rate which is controlled by the potential superior. In its totality, the arrangement seems to bring more benefits to the superior rather than to the subordinates.

However, the practice of working for a limited time during the famine months and going back home during harvests has created much difficulty to the employer in terms of continuous service from the household help. This, in fact, has now reduced the opportunities of the uplanders and the Negritos in obtaining the jobs during summer since the employers have already learned their lessons during the previous years.

### *Competition*

Competition is a social process which eventually brings complete exclusion of the unsuccessful competitor from the scene. In a perfectly competitive system, this may happen. Otherwise, it may only involve the restructuring of resource control so that a new population group may control one resource category while another on the other category. In the real social world, constant process of reshuffling social roles takes place due to social competition. Others are replaced while new forms of arrangements may emerge.

In the Lake Balinsasayao and the Cangguhub areas, competition seems to be taking place in the control of the land. While it is true that both areas are considered to be forest reserves, a good number of people are trying their luck to own the right to a piece of land in these areas.

mally, the mortgaged amount will be counted as part of the payment for the land. This arrangement usually happens when the land owner is expecting a big expense in the future. For instance marriage of a son may lead to this arrangement. However, the owner expects that after marriage the son may be able to raise the money and can take back the land at a designated period.

The other is a mortgage system with a clause for an absolute sale. Under this system, the mortgagor promises to pay the mortgagee back the amount on a designated period and in case the owner fails to pay on schedule, the property is automatically considered as sold. This happens during extreme cases when the owner is badly in need of cash. For instance, a Negrito farmer was forced to go into this arrangement when his son was accused of murder and he needed the money to hire a lawyer.

The competition for land ownership is basically taking place under certain circumstances when the land owner is under extreme financial difficulty. Fitness here is basically gauged on the ability of a person to produce the desired amount of money at the right time. There is no coercion involved between the interested person and the potential land vendor. The victor has only to wait patiently until the right time comes. In fact, the person who has the money during this particular crisis will have the chances to get the land at a price and arrangement most favorable to him.

Since there is an apparent degree of mutual respect between the uplanders and the lowlanders on the first hand, and between the Negritos and the Cebuanos on the other, recent incidents of orchestrated coercion on the part of the land speculators to force the farmers to sell their property, rarely happen.

During the early times, the Cebuanos used to threaten Negritos to force the latter to sell their land to the former. In the present, with all the land already occupied, the Negritos can no longer be threatened. They now seek legal protection from constituted authorities. Hence, competition has to be carried on in a most socially acceptable manner.

*Accommodation*

Accommodation is a friendly attempt between groups to allow each other to have access to the resources of the respective groups. Such mutual access can take the form of exchange where resources of different nature, qualities and quantities are involved. The exchange process could take various forms like generalized sharing, balanced reciprocity and trading.

Accommodation tends to intensify between groups whose relationship is further reinforced by other forms of social ties such as friendship, affinity through ceremonies and other legitimizing processes. These links allow the free flow of information and goods across various social units.

*Generalized Sharing:* This is a form of exchange where reciprocity is not expected theoretically. It is largely a gesture of friendship between individuals coming from the same or different groups. Such form of sharing may involve portable goods or real property.

Among the lowlanders and the uplanders of Lake Balinsaragao, sharing of land rights is a common practice between close friends or relatives. A lowlander who wants to utilize a temporary clearing in the upland is allowed by his friends to do so on the uplander's farm without any obligation to the latter. The arrangement is that the borrower uses it for a short time only after which it goes back to the owner. Otherwise, if it involves a longer period of time, a fixed sharing arrangement of products is followed.

Between the Cebuanos and the Negritos in the Cangguhub area, generalized sharing usually involves farm produce like corn and root crops. While this arrangement does not involve a return theoretically, there is actually an implicit moral obligation on the part of the recipient to extend similar gesture to his donor when the right time comes. The return does not have to come promptly, and does not have to be of the same kind and quantity.

However, each party tries to give an amount that will please the other so that a see-saw effect of the giving and taking will take place alternatively, making the whole system a continuing process

Such process of accommodation allows both population groups to handle seasonal problems of food scarcity especially when the households involved come from two different domestic developmental cycle stages. In the context of adjustments, households with unfavorable demographic pressure on food supply may be assisted through generalized sharing by households with otherwise favorable food supply.

*Balanced Reciprocity:* It is an explicitly agreed form of arrangement where certain goods change hands from the "haves" to the "have-nots." Goods are rated according to quantity and quality. Reciprocation does not necessarily happen immediately. In most cases, the reciprocation is delayed, in which case penalties are imposed for the delay.

For instance, between the uplanders and the lowlanders in the Lake Balinsasayao area, cash may be needed very badly by the uplander. A lowlander may provide cash advance to the farmer before the harvesting time on condition that the amount will be paid with certain quantity of agricultural product. Normally, the computation for determining the repayments takes into account the interest and risks of delay.

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Among the Negritos and the Cebuanos in Canguhub and goods in kind are generally involved. This usually happens during the months of food scarcity. Generally, the Cebuanos have always an edge over the Negritos in the availability of food resources during the months of scarcity. Hence, the Negritos generally

depend on the former during lean months for their food supply. However, the Negritos usually pay the price. The Cebuanos may advance agricultural products like corn to the Negritos during off-harvest period, while the latter pays the former during the harvest time. Normally, the lending period lasts utmost three months. Three months after, a payment has to be made. Normally the repayment doubles the amount of what was borrowed during the lean months period.

The idea of balanced reciprocity is quite complex. It takes into account a number of factors when reciprocation is made. The length of time the goods will have to be reciprocated and the risks involved in possible failure of reciprocation are considered in fixing the amount to be paid in a balanced reciprocation. Hence, balanced reciprocity does not necessarily mean equal amount of goods or cash changing hands between transacting parties. It signifies balancing the risks and the opportunity costs between two different goods transferring hands during two different temporal points. Thus, balanced reciprocity does not necessarily signify quantitative equality of goods. It includes intrinsic cost not necessarily associated with the goods involved in with the transaction *per se*.

*Trading:* Trading represents a process where resources assumed to have equal value change hands, legitimized by the use of medium, usually money. Since different social aggregates may control different kinds of goods or products, these groups theoretically exchange goods through a series of conversion of goods in kind into cash and perhaps finally into other goods in kind. For instance, a Negrito brings a chicken for sale to a trading center in order to buy salt. He negotiates a sale, with a Cebuano. Once the deal is closed, the Negrito gets his cash and then uses it to purchase salt right at the same trading center.

This process of inter-ethnic accommodation, is characterized by the attempts of both contracting parties to derive profit from the goods involved. Sahlins (1965) has classically called this as "negative reciprocity." Negative reciprocity, however, is an extreme form of trading which is generally characterized by deceit

and cleverness to outsmart each other. Despite such negative social characteristic of trading, the element of social accommodation is still maintained.

### Summary and Implications for Development

It is very apparent that the resource use patterns between social aggregates in the two upland communities of Negros Oriental suggest certain degree of interdependence between groups in order to survive. While it is true that there are incidences of social and economic imbalances between transacting individuals these imbalances have to take place due to the nature of the transaction. For instance, in a balanced reciprocity, the recipient will have to pay the cost of delayed payment and the risks for possible failure of payment.

There is only one process that appears to put the inferior cultural group at a distinct disadvantage. It is in the process of competition where the uplander or the Negritos are unwittingly displaced from their land by the Cebuanos. This process of displacement, however, is no longer employed through the act of coercion or threat by the Cebuano lowlanders. The inferior condition of the Negrito and other uplanders compared to the Cebuano lowlanders is a subtle way by which land ownership will soon be shifted to the latter. It is a sad thing since land is the source of living for these Negritos and other uplanders.

Development programs, therefore, in the upland should take this particular process (like competition) seriously in order to protect the interest of the people we wish to help in the upland. While land is the basic resource for the upland dweller's development, it is precisely this resource vied for by a competing ethnic group. Since threat and coercion can no longer be used at present, the Cebuanos are taking undue advantage of the extreme economic difficulty of the Negritos and other uplanders to hasten the misplacement process.

Upland development programs should take serious measures of protecting upland clientele from this difficulty. Modest local program for handling such emergency needs should be provided.

Legal prohibition from disposing land rights is not enough since people can easily get around this when an emergency need for cash is pressing. Hence, such legal restrictions should be provided with a realistic program of assistance. The base for upland development is land. Upland development process, therefore, becomes meaningless when the potential clientele is gradually losing this resource through unfair competition.

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