

THINGS OF IMPORTANCE: WHAT MARGINALIZED FARMERS IN SELECTED SITES IN NEGROS ORIENTAL ARE CONCERNED ABOUT

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Introduction

There are possible conflicts between what people consider important and what change agents introduce as innovations in a given community. If we have to respect the wisdom of the local farmers, values locked within the traditional societies of mountain barangays must be seriously explored. This is important if an innovation has to take place in harmony with the value priorities of the people whom it is intended to serve.

An invention when applied for the first time is called an innovation (Mansfield, 1971). An innovation is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual. It is the subjective newness of the idea for the individual — more than whether or not an idea is objectively new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery — that really matters (Rogers, 1962; Rogers and Shoemakers, 1971). The dominant values of a person influence the adoption of innovation.

In all these long years of attempts at community development, planners, implementors and project evaluators have dismally failed to look deep into the beneficiaries' value systems, their indigenous learning styles and their resources, on which to base what and how to embark on change efforts. An assessment of the agri-technology transfer in the ethnic barangays of the northern Luzon highlands reveals that, among many interested variables, factors such as value orientation, perception, attitudes aspiration, and belief system have been found to have direct effect on a farmer's decision to adopt or reject a given agritechnology (Consolacion, et. al., 1983). The same study underscores the fact that in the decision to adopt a given agritechnology, the

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farmer involves his wife and children. Necessarily, what a farmer and his family consider as important things in life figure significantly in the process of decision making — whether or not to adopt any introduced innovation in the farm.

ALTERNATIVE VALUES

Persons are free to choose ideas, beliefs and behavior which best represent the nature of their existence and the direction they would choose for their lives. Jung and Piaget view values as the dynamic stance the self takes to the total environment. As the person evolves and the environment changes, values are constantly being rechosen from a host of alternatives (Hurlock, 1974).

In understanding values, one may consider two of the categories presented by Linton (1936) in describing the content of a culture — the universals and alternatives. Linton defines universals as “those ideas, habits, and conditioned emotional responses which are common to all sane, adult members of the society.” His universals would include those core values held in common by all members of the culture. Core values remain central to a society for a long period of time. They are the foundation beliefs, the bedrock of society’s existence and maintenance. His alternative consists of “a considerable number of traits which are shared by certain individuals but which are not common to all the members of the society.” Alternative values would represent the socially acceptable beliefs and behaviors available for individual choice.

The availability of alternative values is often cyclical. The social acceptability of an alternative influences individual choice and the frequency of its display determine in large measure, its availability for choice (Munson, 1971). Let us consider, for example, the practice of some farmers to play volleyball as a form of recreation. When players are encouraged by fellow farmers and the game is punctuated with cheers by onlookers, the farmers-players find social acceptance and are likely to participate in the same game in future occasions. Moreover, if this form of recreational activity is regularly done during predictable times of the

cropping season, say, after land preparation or after planting of the main cash crop or perhaps during *pangulilang* (secondary cropping season), then farmers at such times will likely play the game as a group's favorite pastime.

A shift in the agricultural cycle is associated with a shift in the type of recreational activity. During harvest season, for instance, farmers are observed to engage more in a game of *hantak* (a game of chance played by tossing of coins) than in the local volleyball game. This is due in part to the fact that during harvest season, farmers have some cash on hand. Also, gathering *sayote* (*Sechium edule*), let us say, and carrying them to a lowland market center are physically exhausting tasks. Thus, a nonphysical game of *hantak* appears to be a more appropriate recreation for a work-heavy season and a physically demanding game of volleyball is an appropriate game for a slack season.

THE PRESENT STUDY

In this study, values refer to what farmers consider as "important things in life." The underlying assumption is that the extent to which community programs correspond to what farmers value in life indicate relevance of such programs to beneficiaries' lives.

Nonformal, nondirective interviews employing the methods of *pagtatanong-tanong* (unstructured, unobtrusive question-and-answer method) and *pakikipagsalamuha* (meaning, literally, "to mix with") were conducted with selected men, women and children in the upland communities.

The first group of upland farmers who served as respondents of the study are dwellers in the rainforest of Balinsasayao, a mountain range due northeast of Cuernos de los Negros, the highest mountain peak in the province, west of Dumaguete City. The rainforest is part of a critical watershed in the region. A survey conducted in 1981-82 revealed that these farmers used to come from lowland communities and were driven to encroach on forest lands due to population pressure. The greatest number of these farmers moved up within the past 30 years (Abregana, 1984). The earliest recorded in-migration was in 1920s. At present, forest guards of the Philippine National Oil Corporation

are said to protect the areas from new occupants aside from their expected task of prohibiting illegal cutting down of trees. Two major programs have been introduced to the farmers in this region. A government-sponsored program under the then Ministry of Agriculture was launched in the late '70s. Some farmers, especially those in the lower part of the mountain range, engaged in backyard goat or cattle-raising. In 1981, Silliman University initiated an agroforestry program to settlers within and adjacent to the remaining forest buffer zone. Several soil erosion control techniques and contouring mesaures were introduced to farming households. Some farmers volunteered to be cooperators in the management and maintenance of demonstration plots to show the effectiveness of terracing and various crop combinations on erosion control. Other households adopted proper tree-crop mix in their forest farms. By tending cash crops, several families went above subsistence levels. Some farmers, however, continued to play the role of bystanders and observers. Some continued to engage in age-old farm practices and manifested less enthusiasm in initiating or effecting change.

Negritos in the mountains of Mabinay toward south of Negros island comprise the second group of respondents. A historically-known cultural minority group of hunters and gatherers, Negritos at present have no resource but to engage in permanent cultivation. The changes in Negritos' lifestyle are attributed to the disappearance of the forest and the increasing upland migration of lowlanders who compete with the Negritos for economic survival (Cadelina, 1974; E. Oracion, 1983). In 1950, the total number of Negrito households in the area was placed at 30 (T. Oracion, 1960) and in 1983, the population has increased to 73 households (E. Oracion, 1983). Over the years, the Negritos have assimilated into the larger Cebuano population and culture through social interactions and intermarriages. The danger of biological extinction of the pure Negrito population looms (E. Oracion, 1983).

In the face of these biological changes, Negritos (locally known as Ata) in the Cangguhub resettlement area eke out a living as farm cultivators. A group of 18 Ata households occupy 21 hectares of denuded forestal lands on government lease to

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Silliman University. This year, an action-oriented research project under the auspices of the University Research Center maximized its community assistance by providing Negritos a full-time community worker who helps them in their agricultural activities.

The Cangguhub project sponsors a nonformal, once-a-week education classes for children and adults, usually on a Saturday or a Sunday. In Balinsasayao, Silliman University has extension classes in Grades 1 and 2. On the whole, Balinsasayao farmers are better off than their Ata counterparts in terms of cropping system, level of farm development, diversity of food resources, and marketing relations with lowland buyers of farm produce. The impending threat, however, to the sustainability of farms in Balinsasayao is the presence of military and nonmilitary elements whose activities undermine peace and order in the area.

At the time of fieldwork in May to July 1988, the active members of BANAGBANAG, the farmers' association in Balinsasayao, was estimated at 25 households. Several families resettled in the lowland communities because of fear that they will be entangled in the skirmish between the military (or paramilitary) and the alleged underground political reformists.

Fourteen households were represented in the study. In this sample group, six were male respondents and eight were female respondents (see Table 1). Seven children from the 14 households represented were available to participate in the study. The age range of the female respondents was between 24 to 44 while that of the male respondents was between 18 to 70. The age levels of children ranged from 8 to 12. The total number of household members ranged from 3 to 1. All the households except three were nuclear families.

In Mabinay, about 18 households reside in the Negrito settlement in Bo. Cangguhub. Fifteen households were represented in the study. In all, there were 19 adult respondents. Of this number, 11 were males and eight females (see Table 1). Eighteen children were available for the study. Female adults were between 15 to 47 years of age while male respondents were between the ages of 13 to 30. Children respondents were between 6 to 12

years old. It is worthwhile to note that five adults (3 males and 2 females) and three children could not tell their age. This denotes that there are still members of this ethnic community that have not adopted the use of Gregorian calendar in marking the passage of time. Household size was anywhere between 2 to 11 members in a dwelling unit. Except for one household, all Negrito households in this study were nuclear families.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A value is operationally defined in this study as any object, belief or idea considered to be essential in one's life. This was elicited by asking the stimulus question, "What to you are the three most important things in life?" In a conversational manner, respondents were asked to elucidate their responses. Afterwards, they were led to identify which among the "important in life" mentioned is the value which they would least likely to give up and which value they would more likely give up.

Among the Balinsasayao participants, all females identified at least three things in life that are important while only three out of the six male respondents did the same. Two males could identify only two most important things in life while one insisted that there is only one important thing in life. Among the children, two could give only two important things in life.

In the Canggub sample, five out of the eight women respondents mentioned only two important things in life while six out of the eleven males did the same. Only three among the women and five among the men identified three important things in life. Among the children, only two could not give three things of importance — one identified only one and another identified just two.

Not one among the respondents in both sites offered more than three things of considerable importance. In fact, their responses appear closely interrelated and hooked on basic subsistence needs. This finding indicates that both groups of farmers are concerned about matters of day-to-day existence far different from the variety of aspirations hoped for by formally educated lowland populace.

Table 4

Most Important Things In Life That Are Least Likely To Be Given Up by the Respondents

	Males (n=8)	Females (n=6)	Children* (n=7)
A. Balinsasayao Sample			
1. Farm work	5	1	—
2. Food	1	4	3
3. Prayers to God	—	2	—
4. Good harvest	—	1	—
5. Education	—	—	2
6. Clothes	—	—	2
7. Playing games	—	—	1
B. Canguhub Sample			
1. Farm work	8	2	2
2. Food	3	4	2
3. Faith in God	—	—	5
4. Education	—	—	5
5. Clothes	—	1	2
6. Household utensil	—	1	—
7. Help at home	—	—	2

*Total does not add up to 7. One child insisted that food and playing games are the most important things that she cannot give up.

Differences Between Sites

Clearly, in both sample groups, farm work is considered important in life. A cursory examination of Table 2 reveals that for both male and female groups, Balinsasayao has relatively more factors identified as important things compared to the Cangguhub sample. This suggests that, comparatively speaking, Cangguhub group has more focused and simpler wants than its Balinsasayao counterpart. This may be seen as a function of the level of group growth or farm development stage occurring in each site. In Cangguhub, farmers are just beginning to engage in permanent cultivation, plant trees in their deforested area, and they have not established a consistent marketing relations with the lowland consumers. Balinsasayao farmers for their part have cash crops in their forest farms, they enjoy richer ecological niche (patches of primary forest still exist, upland lakes are sources of fish, and the down base of the forest is near the sea) and they have established relations with lowland market centers. As such, Balinsasayao respondents now begin to consider higher order needs like education, better health, prayers to God, and more cash in addition to basic needs for food and the utmost importance given to farm work. In the case of Cangguhub farmers, they put premium on the acquisition of household utensils, farm animals, and clothes next to farm work and food. Child care is considered important while having a good health was not mentioned at all. A visit to the Ata resettlement area will show that children below 10 years old proliferate which may explain why child care is deemed important by the group.

The matter on health is an interesting point to examine. Subsistence Ata farmers did not identify good health as an important aspect in life. Perhaps, being able to live is enough for them at this stage. Balinsasayao sample, being a relatively advanced group now aspires for good health. The fact that this is mentioned mostly by women in the latter group serves as a clue for health entry approaches in the upland communities. In a study conducted earlier, Balinsasayao farmers recognized health as a causal attribution for success in farm work (Abregana, 1988). Poor health was noted to be a cause for failure but good health was not mentioned as a factor for success in farming.

Table 2

Total Number of Occurrences Each Important Thing In Life Is Identified By Respondents, Regardless of Ranked Order

Things of importance	Balinsasayao		Cangguhub	
	Males (n=6)	Females (n=8)	Males (n=11)	Females (n=8)
				Total (n=14)
1. Farm work	6(%)	5(%)		11(100%)
2. Food	1	3		4
3. Prayers to God	1	4		5
4. Money	1	2		3
5. Good harvest	1	1		2
6. Education	2	3		5
7. Clothes	-	2		2
8. Recreation/game	2	-		2
9. Farm tools/household utensils	-	-		-
10. Off-farm work	1	1		2
11. Good health	1	4		5
12. House/or shelter	1	-		1
13. Child care	-	-		-
14. Peace	-	1		1
15. Farm animals	-	-		-
				Total (n=19)
1. Farm work	10	5		15
2. Food	4	5		9
3. Prayers to God	-	-		-
4. Money	1	-		1
5. Good harvest	-	-		-
6. Education	1	-		1
7. Clothes	-	3		3
8. Recreation/game	-	-		-
9. farm tools/household utensils	6	2		8
10. Off-farm work	-	-		-
11. Good health	-	-		-
12. House/shelter	-	-		-
13. Child care	2	2		4
14. Peace	-	-		-
15. Farm animals	3	2		5

This implies that the concept of health among the farmers is still prescriptive rather than preventive in nature.

There is a need to underscore the fact that only the Canggub sample talked of proper child care, having farm animals and owning household tools or utensils as important. Any community program to be introduced or now being introduced must consider these distinct needs of the community if the program has to be responsive to people's felt concerns. Also, only the Balinsasayao sample openly valued good health, good harvest, availability of farm work, recreation, improved housing condition and peace in the community. As earlier mentioned, this list demonstrates higher-order needs among the Balinsasayao farmers. Again any project undertaken or to be undertaken in this forest community must take into account these identified necessities.

Gender Differences

Thus far, we have examined location-specific differences. Let us explore some gender differences in our sample groups. More men than women identified farm work as important while more women than men identified having food as important. It would look like in these farming households, males attach high value on the process of production (that is, farm work) while women assign considerable importance to the result of production and other terminal results of production are important items (such as having food and acquiring clothes). Clothes, food identified more by women than men probably because, among the household members, women take the role of consciously attending to the day-to-day needs of the family. This nurturance role among women is also manifested in the importance placed on good health by Balinsasayao females. Value placed on the means of production like farm tools is also noticed among Mabina males.

Three females and just one male in the Balinsasayao sample mentioned prayers to God as one of the important things in life. While the respondents talked of prayer as a necessary ingredient of a good harvest, they were more emphatic in associating this act to the importance of attaining lasting peace in their forest environment.

Table 3

Important Things In Life As Identified By Children In Two Sites

Things Of Importance	Frequency of Responses in Balinasayao	Frequency of Responses in Cangguhub	Total
1. Education	6	12	18
2. Assistance/help in farming	4	8	12
3. Playing games	3	5	8
4. Clothes	2	6	8
5. Faith in God	-	8	8
6. Food	3	4	7
7. Household chores	-	4	4
8. Good health	-	3	3
9. Parents	1	-	1
10. Earn money	-	1	1

The Children

In many community studies, concerns of children are often overlooked. Yet, children constitute a significant number in any given rural population in our country. What do children view as important things in life? Table 3 reveals children's ideas about things of importance.

Things of Importance That Are Least Likely To Be Given Up

The respondents were pressed to choose which from among the important things identified they would least likely give up. This allowed them to choose freely from a set of self-identified alternatives these they value most in life. Table 4 outlines the result.

Balinsasayao men were almost one in saying that the most important things in life is *pamaul* or farm work. To them, their life depends on farming. As they say, farming is life and life is farming. This is echoed in the words of a 53-year old forest farmer who said "*Ang pamaul ang pinakabilihon sa kinabuhi tungod kay kini mao lamang ang tinubdan sa tanan nga among gikinahanglan parang mabuhi*" (Farming is the most important thing in life because this is the only source that provides for all our needs in life).

Most Balinsasayao women considered food important and emphasized the forest farm as a source of food products such as *sayote* and *camote* as cash crops, and corn and *camote* as staple crops. Some women also mentioned that they have *baguio* beans, squash and *gabi* in their farms that they can cook for the family meals. These women, in stressing that food cannot possibly be given up, assert that they regularly help their husbands in the farm by weeding and planting crops. "*Pagkaon ang pinakabilihon. Tungod kay ania man kami sa bukid ug halayo sa lungsod, gikinahanglan nga anaay mga salag-on sa baul para makasuportar sa inadlaw-adlaw nga panginahanglan*" (Food is most important. Since we are here in the mountain far from the town, it is imperative that we have farm crops to support us in our daily needs). Thus, said a 40-year old female with four children. Prayer is another thing of importance that is least likely to be given up by two

Balinsasayao women. "*Pinaagi sa pag-ampo ang atong mga pangamuyo makab-ot*" (Through prayers, our petitions will be granted). These petitions or *pangamuyo* include a plea for peace and good harvest.

Children in the Balinsasayao sample could not imagine giving up food, clothes, and the opportunity to attend school. One child insisted that food and playing games are two inseparable important elements in her life.

The pattern for Cangguhub males is similar to the rainforest men. Farm is also viewed to be of great importance. Among the female respondents in Cangguhub, food is likewise of paramount concern. Their difference with the Balinsasayao female participants is the utmost importance placed on such basic necessities as clothes and household utensils.

Children in the Negrito resettlement site view life's priorities differently from their elders. More of them value education and faith in God — things of importance that do not figure significantly among adults in the Negrito community.

AGENDA FOR CHANGE

To what extent have ongoing programs in the two sites responded to what farmers describe as important things in life? Given the data, one can examine whether or not ongoing community programs serve to answer what people value most in life. At the outset, it can be said that existing Silliman University-initiated projects in Balinsasayao and Cangguhub sites have components that are geared toward the satisfaction of basic sustenance needs of the farmers. All the respondents confirmed this assertion. Farm cultivators are given assistance in soil erosion control techniques, farm management strategies, choice of proper tree-crop combinations, and in the case of Balinsasayao marketing of farm produce. All these activities are related to farm work — the most important thing in life of the farmers.

Closely associated with farming is the value placed on food. Built into the innovations introduced to the communities is the goal to make farmers engage in forest preservation as well as to

Table 1

Respondents' Characteristics Classified By Groups Of Respondents and Location of

Study

Categories by Sites	Adults			Total
	Males	Females	Children	
1. Sample size				
Balinsasayao	6	8	7	21
Mabinay	11	8	18	37
Total	17	16	25	58
2. Age range (in years)				
Balinsasayao	18-70	24-44	8-12	8-70
Mabinay*	15-47	13-30	6-12	6-47
3. Household size (range)				
Balinsasayao	3-8	4-8	5-11	3-11
Mabinay	2-11	4-11	4-10	2-11

*Eight respondents (3 males, 2 females, 3 children) could not tell their age.

adopt farm practices that are consistent with the principles of ecological balance. These built-in agenda will remain alien to the client system unless the basic needs and immediate personal wants are satisfied. To borrow and modify a cliché, "The way to a farmer's heart is through the stomach." However, concern for food should not just be associated with quantity, but also, more importantly, with quality.

Importance placed on food can be tied in with the importance placed on health mostly by women and children. An earlier report (Abregana, 1984) made the following claims:

"Our assessments of the household members' nutritional status reveal low intake of calories and protein. The respondents and their families have also been found to be susceptible to common respiratory ailments. Protein and calorie deficiencies, and respiratory problems may be caused by low food output per household, inadequate nutritional knowledge and poor health services delivered to the area.

The Silliman University Medical Center and the Silliman College of Nursing will be tapped to send a team of health workers to the area on a regular bases, focusing primarily on the health care of children. Preventive measures should be the main emphasis. Local residents, especially housewives, will be given training in the preparation and medicinal use of local herbs and other plants for treating ailments.

The Department of Home Economics of Silliman University will be asked to initiate a nutrition drive, concentrating on the selection and preparation of food from local sources. Residents will be made aware of the dietary needs of members of the family, taking into consideration, the age levels and nature of work these household members may be engaged in. Special dietary requirements of children, the weak and the elderly will also be presented.

Building on these initial contacts, parents may be called to discussions of common health and nutrition problems. It is hoped that such discussions will lead parents to possible

solutions to health problems, as well as emphasize to them the importance of improving the quality, variety and productivity of their farms." (Abregana, 1984:18).

Latest reports on incidence of illness (Cadeliña and Cadeliña in this volume) and nutritional intake (Fontelo and Lim in this volume) showed some improvements among the Lake Balinsasayao subjects.

Education is another thing of value identified in both areas although mostly by children in Cangguhub. While an extension class has been set up in Balinsasayao and nonformal classes for children and adults are held in Cangguhub, there is a need to devise a module that will contain topics of direct relevance to a forest community — such special topics as location-specific ecological concepts and proper forest-farm management. Another module that may prove useful, especially for the Negritos is one that will facilitate critical analysis of the restraining and driving forces in one's social psychological make-up. Predilections to *sugal* (game of chance), lack of a sense of cooperativeness, disproportionate spending of time for fun and recreation are some observed ways that may pose as barriers to personal and sociocultural development. Preservation of the Ata's cultural identity, even as they continue to interact with lowland cultural majority, can be a worthwhile educational goal.

One way of applying the knowledge about what farmers deem important in life is not simply to consider the number of important things identified or to count the number of people who mentioned a particular thing of value but to assess how a given value can have an effect on impact on people's lives. While we say that Balinsasayao farmers have gone beyond basic needs for food, clothing and shelter, and that they have now moved on to higher-order needs, recent developments in the area can have an overriding, crippling effect on the initial gains achieved by the Silliman University project. This recent development refers to threats to peace and order in the community brought about by the confirmed visits of military, paramilitary and alledged insurgents to the area. Except for one, forest dwellers are hesitant to talk openly about the situation. The perceived precarious situation is

usually referred to in a stilted fashion like in the farmers' expression of valuing prayers to God which is actually explained as their way of coping with the threats to peace. Unless, as perceived by the farmers, the peace situation improves, no amount of agritechnology and new farm innovations will motivate farmers to stay on in the community. In the event that forest dwellers will vacate their farm lots, one wonders if the move will prove beneficial to the forest preservation program. One thing can be sure. In the absence of viable alternatives, displaced farmers' things of importance in life will revert back to a rock-bottom need to survive.

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