

THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE NEGRITOS OF LUNA, APAYAO

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to document the economic activities of the Negritos of Lower Apayao. Specifically, it is intended to determine the economic activities of the Negritos of Lower Apayao; and determine coping strategies of the negritos for survival. The descriptive method of research was used with interview and observation as main data-gathering tools. Respondents of were 24 Negrito families however, key informants were also identified for the purpose of validating data generated from observations and interviews.

Results showed that the economic activities done by the negritos are: foraging, hunting, fishing, paid labor, backyard hog and poultry raising, basket weaving, and upland farming. Their income derived from their daily economic activities is just sufficient for their daily existence.

In order to survive, they have varied coping strategies which include caroling, mixing rice with cassava/ other rootcrops, simple living, bartering, engaging in other livelihood activities and getting acquaintance with other cultural groups to work with them in their farms.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Negritos or negrillos, the “little black people”, who are also called Aetas or Itas in the Philippines, are socially related to the negro race. The Negritos are the earliest people to migrate to the Philippines. They traveled over the land bridges, which connected the Philippines with mainland Asia. They reached the mountainous northern regions of the Philippines by hiking and seeking for food and settlement some 25, 000 and 30, 000 years B.C. (Beyer,1918:929).

The Negritos are among the smallest people on earth. They are usually five (5) feet tall, with black skin, dark kinky hair, round black eyes and flat nose. The Aetas are primitive people with culture belonging to the Old Stone Age. They had no community life and only practiced the crudest religion, with a belief in charms, amulets, fetishes, or even animal or human sacrifices. However, they were among the world’s best archers and herbalists. The bow and arrow carrying pygmies or Negritos were the earliest inhabitants of the mountain regions of Northern Luzon.

The Negritos are one of the deprived or perhaps the most deprived cultural minorities in the country. These tribal people do not give importance to formal education or school- based learning. Their opposition to school-based learning is maybe due to racial prejudice and their nomadic character.

In today’s technological advancement where lowlanders uses intricate technologies for food production, it is important to look into the negritos economic activities to derive lesson from them and develop possible intervention to uplift their economic status.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Negritos

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Panizo (1982: 66-67)states that one of the significant races of the world from the view of Anthropology are the Negritos.

They provided Anthropologists with remarkable clue to prehistoric times, and studying them will contribute immensely to the solution of some of the enigmas concerning the recorded antiquity of man, wave migrations, racial differences, linguistics relationships, etc.

Wilson made mention of the Aetas along the branches of Abulug River. He pointed out the character traits of these people who are able to endure hardship of life such as going with little food for several days. They are kind, hospitable and peaceful group of people devoted to their relatives and friends. They are imbued with high morals especially with regards to honesty and sexual matters (Panizo, 1982:66-67). Collins (1973:65) wrote that the Negritos are similar to the Nomadic people of Australia. These people are not planting, tame no animals, are bad drinkers, do not have conception of private possessions. That the land was held collectively by the group of tribe. Hunting and fishing were a collective enterprise; that sharing of food with others is a prime obligation, that even wives of one may be offered to a kinsman. Fighting is only a vengeance or to punish violators of taboos.

The Negritos have the lowest layer of human culture, in the same level with Australian and some New Guinean tribesman. They are close to nature but with little attachment to place and little sense of the past and the future. They are not food producers; they do not practice agriculture and herding in a systematic way. The Negrito members prepare the kaingin field or they fish or hunt. They are indeed, expert hunters, staking the game until it is within the poisoned arrows. The freedom of their nomadic life is their blood and nature. They may suddenly disappear from the settlement especially when their plants are destroyed by weather or after the death of a family members or if they notice the presence of evil spirit around the locality. Dr. Maceda added three other reasons motivating the change of settlements of Negritos such as when dirt accumulated around the huts. Rather than clean the area, they prefer to move to other places; if many flies invade the place; and when strangers of different races visit their settlements.

The favorite game hunt of the Negritos is of deer and wild pigs which they hunt during moonlight nights with group of dogs, attacking the game with poisoned steel arrow. They use stone hammer and anvils to manufacture these weapons. In fact, it is not just true that hunting is a male activity among the negritos. Agnes Estioko-Griffin reported that negrito women frequently hunt together without the company of men or they accompany the men in teamwork efforts. They sometimes take their infants with them on the hunt, carrying their children on their backs.

Negrito women plant the field with camote, cassava, corn and others. Some of them still gather edible roots, wild fruits, seeds, honey, etc. They also weave fishing nets and mats from plant fibers. Because they have to move where they can have more foods, they carry no heavy belonging and build no

permanent shelters. Wind breaks or no side lean- tos or a little sloping roof over their heads is enough for them. They place the ridge pole over the pole tripod and roof the hut with leaves or grasses. The building of huts on top of trees was a common practice before. On the account of modern circumstances, contemporary negritos are forced to live in settlements, to build ordinary one-room huts of local materials and cultivate a lot of work as tenants. They also have permanent cemeteries.

Simon (1982) found out on his study on the community life of the Negritos (Dumagats) of Palanan, Isabela that Negritos are non-Christian and still in the hunting and gathering stage of economic life; to them, earning a living is a way of life and their only purpose is to eat, sleep and to survive; under the natural flow of circumstances, the food resources available to them are very sufficient; population pressure from the outside world is their main problem; most of them have shown interest in owning a titled land to cultivate; the mats, hats and fans they produced command a good price if given proper market value because of the product superior quality; and they are not really indolent. Their so called indolence is an effect rather than the cause of backwardness and it is only the effect of their simple aspirations for a happy, contented life.

The means of educating their children is very informal which started in their homes by their parents either by instruction or by example. Boys are taught how to secure food or income and girls are taught how to do household chores by taking care of their younger sisters and brothers (Tamanut, 1996).

III. OBJECTIVES

This study was conducted to determine economic activities of the Negritos of Lower Apayao. Specifically, it is intended to determine the economic activities of the Negritos of Lower Apayao; and to determine coping strategies of the negritos for survival.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study made use of the descriptive survey method of research with interview and observation as instruments in gathering of data. Presentation of profile variables gathered as well as analysis of their economic status was done for the purpose of establishing a picture of their economic status.

Locale of the Study

The study was purposely conducted at barangay Sta. Lina, San Isidro Sur, Capagaypayan, and Zumigui, San Gregorio. Negrito communities are widely distributed in Lower Apayao particularly in the towns of Luna, Pudtol and Flora.

Respondents

Purposive sampling of 24 Negrito families from the specified barangays of Luna was taken as respondents of the study.

Instrument

The instruments used in the study were unstructured interview and observation. The interview was conducted in Ilokano where respondents can easily understand. The Interviews were done in the most informal and un-obstructive manner so as not to arouse any suspicion on the part of the respondents. The researcher relied on the verbal responses of the respondents. Key informant interviews were also conducted to counter check unclear information and gather views of people close to them on their economic activities. The seasonal calendar was also used in gathering major activities of the respondents in a year.

Procedure

Interview and observation was done for a week in Negrito Communities. Observation on their marketing techniques was done for a year especially during market days at San Isidro Sur and Luna. Likewise, negrito residing in Sta. Lina where the

researcher live were observed on how they deal with community people to earn income for their family. Tape recorder was utilized so as to facilitate gathering of data. Likewise, key informants were identified and key informants interviews were also conducted. Economic activities were documented using camera.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, mean and percentage were used.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the profile of respondents according to age.

Table 1
Profile of respondents according to age

| Age bracket | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|------------|
| 46- above | 3 | 2 |
| 37-45 | 9 | 8 |
| 28-36 | 12 | 11 |
| 19-27 | 25 | 22 |
| 10-18 | 33 | 29 |
| 1- 9 | 32 | 28 |
| Total | 114 | 100 |
| Mean Age | 18.68 | |

The table shows that most Negritos belong to the age bracket 10-18. The negrito population is relatively young as revealed in their mean age, 18.68. Marrying at very young age is a factor for the rapid population growth of the negritos.

The data also revealed the short life span of the negritos. The short life span is may be attributed to high adult mortality due to poor health habits, access to hospitalization and reliance to their belief in the spirits to cure their illness.

Table 2
Average size of Negrito family

| Number of children | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| 6-8 | 5 | 21 |
| 3-5 | 15 | 62 |
| 0-2 | 4 | 17 |
| Mean | 4 | |

The table shows the size of Negrito family. The average number of children is 4. The small number of siblings in the family is maybe attributed to high infant mortality due to poor child rearing practices, poor health and nutrition, and the occurrence of diseases such as gastro-intestinal, malaria and others.

Table 3
Profile of respondents according highest educational attainment

| Level of Education | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Not attending school | 93 | 89 |
| Grade I | 2 | 2 |
| Grade II | 1 | 1 |
| Grade III | 4 | 4 |
| Grade IV | 2 | 2 |
| Grade V | 1 | 1 |
| Grade VI | 1 | 1 |

Out of the 104 Negritos from age 6 and above, ninety three (93) have not attended formal school system, four are in grade III, two are in grades I and IV and one in grades II, V, and VI. This implies for their negative attitude towards school-based learning. Their negation to formal schooling is may be attributed to racial discrimination (constant teasing of lowland children), poverty, their nomadic character, and strict implementation of school rules and regulations and obligations.

Major Economic Activities

Amidst difficult socio-economic conditions, the negritos have engaged in economic activities to earn for their survival. They engaged in industries where they took various materials directly from nature such as foraging, fishing, and hunting.

a) Foraging

Foraging is one of the oldest occupations of the Negritos where they gather edible plants, wild orchids and ornamentals directly from the wild. These resources provides them item for consumption or being marketed to provide them additional income for their daily subsistence.

Products derived from foraging activities are sold in the market or from house to house. Other Negritos exchange the products for rice or any valuable items needed for their daily existence.

b) Fishing

Aside from gathering edible plants and ornamentals from the wild, the Negritos are engaged in fishing activities using their improvised fishing gears.

This economic activity is usually done during sunny days usually summer time where rivers and other bodies of water is clear. The establishment of their temporary dwellings is associated with fishing and hunting activities. Usually they built lean- toes to protect them from rains and sunlight.

c) Hunting

Hunting is one of the favorite activities of the Negritos. Their favorite gamehunt is wild pigs and other wild animals. The existence of logging activities in Luna has made them unable to do this important economic activity. Accordingly, wild animals are already far within their reach because of the destruction of the forests. As of now, they are confined in hunting monitor lizard, rats, birds and others. Their hunt is only sufficient for their consumption

d) Basket Weaving

Weaving is predominant occupational activity of Negrito women. This is to argument the low income of their husbands since most of the time they are left at home to take care of their children and to prepare food for the family. The rudiments of weaving have been passed from generations to generations through apprenticeship of Negrito girls. During lean months, these beautiful woven baskets are sold or bartered to rice and other items needed by the family. The cost depends on the size and quality of products developed. Price ranges from 10 pesos to 75 pesos. A small basket cost 10 -15 pesos per piece.

e) Paid Labor

Where labor is capital, most negrito men learned to work in farm in exchange for daily wages. Most of the paid labor job they engaged is farming related activities such as plowing, planting, weeding, harvesting and hauling. This is one reason why most negritos established their dwellings near Ilokano communities. Contrary to what have been doing before isolating themselves from lowlanders, they see this activity more rewarding in order for them to survive. One reason maybe is the continuous depletion of aquatic and wildlife resources, which they derived from their foraging, fishing and hunting activities.

f) Livestock Production

Their constant dealing with Ilokano communities made them adopt some techniques in livestock production such as constructing pigpens and poultry for pig, duck, chicken and others. This activity may not be as profitable with other economic activities. To them, livestock production is only for consumption. Most negrito women are responsible in taking care of their animals.

g) Upland Farming

Most Negrito family are engaged in upland farming where they clear a small area for planting crops just enough for their

consumption. The crops they produced in their kaingin sites are rootcrops, vegetables, and upland rice. Rootcrops has been used as an alternative food during lean months. They mixed cassava with rice for their family consumption. If there are no available rice, the boiled rootcrops served as their food.

Upland farming is both a man & woman activity. Men prepare the area while women do the planting, cultivating and weeding. Harvesting is done by men and women.

Seasonal Calendar

Negritos do not have wide area to cultivate or a stable job to earn for a living. They have to do lot of economic activities in order to survive. The change in season and other circumstances bring them opportunity to undertake various economic activities. Presented below are some major activities done by most Negritos.

Their acquaintances with the lowlanders bring them opportunity to earn for a living. They see it as an opportunity for them to survive amidst the rapid price increase of commodities. Men's activities differ from women. Men usually engaged in hard work farming activities such as plowing, and hauling site in exchange for a daily wage. This is usually done on the onset of the planting and harvesting seasons in the area. For the first cropping season, planting is done on the month of June and July and to be harvested on the months of September and October. Second cropping starts on the month of December and January and harvested in the months of March and April. They do not confine themselves working in the field for paid labor, what is important to them is for them to have enough food for a day. They don't store food for future consumption and if weather is good, they go fishing or hunting.

Hunting and fishing are family enterprises. This is a season for them to move to places where they can find catch. Hunting and fishing are men's activities but women also help in their game hunt. The peak season of hunting and fishing is on the months of April to June. It is also during this time when they gather wild orchids such as butterfly and carabao orchids (flowering season).

They go back to their places when rainy seasons come. When planting time is over on the month of August and September, they gather wild vegetables such as banana blossom, rattan shoot, edible ferns, wild ampalaya and others. Men and women share the responsibility of foraging but marketing is done by women. They sell their products from house to house or barter it for rice and other commodities.

During the lean months (usually January, February, September and October) women weave baskets to be sold to MSWDO office in Luna. They go caroling during the Christmas season.

Table 4
Average daily income derived from different economic activities

| Activity | Average daily income |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Foraging (wild vegetables) | P100-150 |
| Fishing | P 120-150 |
| Paid labor 150/ md (2md) | P 300 |
| Hunting | P 200 |
| Basket weaving | P 150 |

Daily income ranges from 100 to 300 depending on the kind of economic activity the Negritos do. When both (men and women) work for the family, they have enough money to sustain their daily needs.

Food is the major expenditures of the typical Negrito family. Other important items are wine and the radio. Most of them are wine drinkers. Wine drinking activity is done after the day work.

One common item found in most Negrito houses is the radio. The radio has been part of their daily existence. It is a material possession for leisure activities which they listen for

drama, songs and literary pieces. Accordingly, it is also through the radio where they learn.

Table 5
Daily Expenditures*

| Item | Cost | Period of utilization | Average daily expenses |
|---------------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Rice (1 ganta) | 60.00 | 1 day | 60 |
| Battery (4@ 20/ pc) | 80.00 | 2 weeks | 5.7 |
| Bagoong | 20.00 | 1 week | 2.9 |
| Salt | 10.00 | 1 week | 1.4 |
| Nipa wine (1 bot) | 12.00 | 1 day | 12 |
| Can goods,etc.(3) | 36.00 | 1day | 36 |
| Snack | 20.00 | 1 day | 20 |
| Daily expenses | | | 138.00 |

*6 members of the family

Looking at the daily expenditures of a typical Negrito family of 6 members, A 150 peso income is just enough to sustain their daily existence.

The continuous degradation of forests and bodies of water pose a threat to their hunting, fishing and foraging activities.

Their connections with other cultural groups such as the Ilocanos, Isnags and others made them learn other ways of earning for a living.

Proposed Measures to Enhance Productivity

- Assistance through seed grants by the academe and other institutions.
- Training on backyard gardening, and crop production technology of lesser inputs- composting for nutrient management, the use of botanical pesticides for pest control, mulching for weed management, and others.
- Continuous involvement in community affairs to get more acquaintances and to boost their morale making them more responsible citizens.
- Strict implementation of conservation measures in the forests, rivers and other natural resources.
- Informal and alternative learning system should be

undertaken to educate them.

- Teach them the value of work and saving for the rainy days

VI. CONCLUSION

The Negritos have come a long way surviving with the pace in time, able to cope with the rapid technological advancement but remained nomadic. Their constant dealings with other cultural groups gave them opportunity to learn alternative livelihood activities.

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