

Speck in the Vast World of Economy and Politics: An Economic Anthropological Study of the Mamanwa in the Philippines

Asia Pacific Journal of
Multidisciplinary Research
Vol. 6 No. 2, 97-104
May 2018 Part II
P-ISSN 2350-7756
E-ISSN 2350-8442
www.apjmr.com

Bethlehem A. Ponce

Dept. of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences, Visayas State University,
Visca, Baybay City Leyte, Philippines
bethlehemponce@gmail.com

Date Received: March 10, 2018; Date Revised: May 15, 2018

Abstract - *This study will focus on one commodity – rattan, which is the main source of income among the Mamanwa in San Francisco Southern Leyte, Philippines. An indigenous economy may seem like a speck in the political economy of the mainstream society, but it is greatly affected by it. Thus, this study aims to understand how the Mamanwa, an Indigenous People living outside their ancestral domain, cope with the existing laws and policies that somehow affect their traditional subsistence activities. This paper will present first the study of INBAR and USAID about the status of rattan in the world economy and in the Philippines, and the rules imposed by the Philippines to regulate rattan related economic activities. Furthermore, it will discuss how these rules influence the decision-making process of the Mamanwa and how it affects their traditional subsistence activities. As a result, laws, and policies to further develop rattan industry in the country and the laws provided as a way of recognizing the rights of the Indigenous people are not of much help to migrant Indigenous People like the Mamanwa. In this case, inequality of development expansion is correlated to the unequal enjoyment of rights provided by the state which supposed to be accessible to all Filipinos. Unfortunately, for those small-producers who are having difficulties in converting their economic activities into a formal economy remain stagnant. They will remain a speck in the vast world of economics and politics. Data were gathered using anthropological research methods, such as key informant interviews and field observations.*

Keywords – Indigenous People, Decision-making, Development, Rattan Industry

INTRODUCTION

Every single day, we face situations that demand decision makings. Making a decision is not the end of it, rather the process continues as for whether the choice we made is possible or not; acceptable or not; and attainable or not. Chibnik [1] presented the two famous unfinished debate between the formalists and substantivists; the rational decision-making out of self-interest and one that is being constrained by social customs and institutions, respectively. The author also included the argument of the dependency theorists that emphasized how external institutions, such as states and firms limit decision-making process of individuals/group.

Through integration to a larger system, the question is not only how much choice is available, rather would the larger system allows the choices that people chose, specifically among the Indigenous people? The Indigenous people in the Philippines are considered as among the poorest and most marginalized sectors of the Philippine society [2]. Most of them are engaged in

informal economy which “will not gain a place at policy tables” [3].

This paper will focus on the factors that may constrain the choices made by the Mamanwa – a migrant Indigenous People. These factors refer to the policies or guidelines provided by the state and the far-reaching world market. To quote “a different kind of economic competition can be observed in relationships between indigenous peoples and politically dominant groups. Even if it has to some extent become part of the mainstream economy and hence subject to the functioning of the market and so on”[4].

Traditional economies are quite significant in indigenous communities, these are geared to the satisfaction of basic subsistence needs [5]. Re-settlement near the mainstream society necessitates indigenous communities to shift from subsistence to other forms of production, sometimes resulting in “mixed economies”[6]. Integration to the outside world leads them to participate in the economy of the world market in varying degrees. However, small-scale

producers, like most of the indigenous communities, are marginalized and excluded from key policy processes that affect their lives[3]. Further arguments of the authors are worth to quote: “Small producers are excluded or not half represented in formal policy processes. State institutions usually have low responsiveness to smallholders’ interests; often, undifferentiated policies and trade agreements. Policies inherently biased towards large producers, or those that fail to differentiate the specific interests of smaller forms. Small producers, as active economic agents, are finding pathways to survive and perhaps even prosper through modernization and rapid rural change. But these ways are strikingly disconnected from the way most development and business interventions try to ‘make markets work for the poor’”.

Specifically, in looking at the economic status of rattan in the Philippines and the world market, it is quite promising for people engaged in such a livelihood. This becomes more advantageous due to the support and regulations of the state. All these can pave a way for rattan related businesses to flourish. On the other hand, this can also aggravate competition in the market; generally a competition between established businesses, and between established and unestablished unrecognized small-scale rattan gatherers. Although both big and small-scale rattan gatherers have access to resources [rattan] in different means and degrees; only the big rattan businesses have access to the larger market system, and can easily apply for all the requirements as per imposed by the state. This seems to fade the small-scale rattan gatherers in the picture.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Thus, this study will focus on one commodity – rattan, which is the main source of income of a migrant Mamanwa in San Francisco Southern Leyte, Philippines. This paper will present first the study of INBAR with regards to the status of rattan in the world economy and in the Philippines, together with the study of FRAME funded by USAID. This will be followed by the imposed laws in the country to regulate rattan related economic activities. After which, the paper will discuss a more specific case of the subsistence of the Mamanwa and how it changes through time. It will also show how these changes exposed them to a lot of choices and how the actions and goals of the state, through laws or policies, affect the economic decision-making of the Mamanwa. Furthermore, how their choices and the corresponding outcomes situate them

in a larger political-economic system of the Philippines and even in the global market.

This study will only focus on rattan, as the primary commodity of the Mamanwa traditional source of income. Specifically, tackling national policies involving the use of rattan, status of the Philippines in the rattan world market, and how all these factors, together with the changes in the subsistence activities of the respondents due to ecological changes, affect their decision-making processes. Unfortunately, this study will not tackle the political-economic aspect of the Mamanwa as a whole.

METHODS

In compliance with Section 59 of Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as “The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Administrative Order No.1 Series of 2012 entitled “The Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPS) and Customary Laws (CLs) Research and Documentation Guidelines, researches / documentations involving IPs or ICCs should apply for a Certificate Precondition with the concerned NCIP regional office. Before the study commenced, the researcher underwent the process stipulated in the guidelines. This process includes the application, submission of requirements and payment of fees. The most important part of the process was the meeting with the IPs facilitated by the NCIP staff from the regional office in Cebu. This is when the researcher presented and explained the study in a language understandable to the prospect respondents. Confidentiality of specific data and the identity of specific study participants were assured. Free prior and informed consent was given great consideration. After few years, the researcher finally received her certificate[7] .

The participants of this study are the migrant Mamanwa settlers in a semi-kin-based community at Brgy. Pinamudlan, San Francisco Southern Leyte, who came from Gigaquit, Surigao del Norte. Although the Mamanwa is mobile, at present there are 9 families in the community; with a total of 52 individuals; 22 males and 30 females. These figures are based on the initial data gathered conducted last September 2015 by the researcher.

This study utilized the qualitative method; specifically, the ethnographic techniques: participant-observation in the community of the Mamanwa, key informant interviews of the old folks and community leader, and life history interview of each Mamanwa

household. Data gathered were primary and secondary: the narratives of the Mamanwa and the existing national policies involving the subject matter, as well as statistical economic data from existing studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rattan in the World Economy

The following data were taken from one of the reports of the International Network of Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) on 2012[8]. Rattan is considered as one of the world's most important non-timber forest resources. The report shows that the international trade of bamboo and rattan in 2012 was estimated at about US\$2.5 billion, these are raw materials. China is the largest producer and exporter, exported US\$ 1,238 million worth bamboo and rattan products, which accounted for 66% of the world total. It was followed by the EU, with a total export value of US\$ 214 million, accounting for 11% of the world exports. Vietnam, Philippines, USA, Singapore, and Thailand were also important exporters of bamboo and rattan products.

The report presented the case in the Philippines as follows: the country is the 5th most important exporter of rattan products in the world. Exports from the Philippines to the world were valued as US\$ 36.0 million, about 2% of the world export; 47% of which are rattan woven and 44% of furniture and seats. The USA is the main importer of bamboo and rattan produce from the Philippines. In 2012, the total value of bamboo and rattan products imported to the USA from the Philippines reached US\$ 27.4 million, constituting about 76% of total exports from the Philippines to the world. Rattan basketwork shares about 51% of total exports of bamboo and rattan products from the Philippine worth of US\$ 14.1 million.

The study of FRAME on Rattan Value Chain funded by USAID, presented the economic status of rattan industry in the Philippines[10]. To quote: "Wild supplies require rehabilitation to meet industry demand, even at its current reduced levels. Rattan plantations offer a solution to supplement the decreasing supply in natural stands. Agusan Province is the largest rattan-producing areas in the country with 4.9million linear meters production in 2003. It is also the major supplier of rattan to the furniture industry in Cebu. The rattan industries provide livelihoods to thousands of Filipinos, of which the majorities are small-scale producers and processors in rural areas. For

most rattan gatherers in the upland, rattan is about 20% of total household income".

The Government encourages and provides incentives for the development of rattan plantations[10]. Incentives include reduced rental fees for the plantation area; reduced forest charges; provision of rattan seedlings to developers at production cost; free technical assistance; and the right to harvest, sell, convey or dispose of the rattan in any manner the owner sees fit[11].

Rattan, the Philippine laws and the Indigenous Peoples

The Philippine Government, as mandated to protect the right of the people to a balanced and healthy environment, provides necessary measures with regards to resource management and utilization[12]. One of which is the Presidential Decree (PD) No. 705, otherwise known as the Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines. In pursuant to its provisions is the promulgation of the DENR Administrative Order (DAO) No. 04, known as the Revised Regulations Governing Rattan Resources. Considering the fact, that many Indigenous Peoples (IPs) or Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICCs) are very much engaged in resource utilization as a source of income, JOINT DENR-NCIP Memorandum Circular No. 2003-01 dated 31 October 2003 and DENR-NCIP JOINT Administrative Order No. 2008-01 were promulgated. The purpose of the latter is to ensure the recognition, promotion and protection of the IPs/ICCs in their resource management systems and practices[13].

The DAO No. 04 series of 1987 was promulgated to rule and regulate rattan resources [14] Section 3 stated that rattan may be cut, gathered, transported and disposed only through a license issued by the DENR following the guidelines prescribed in these regulations. However, Section 6 made it clear that "no license or permit to cut and gather naturally grown rattan from forest lands or other areas containing rattan shall be granted except through public bidding undertaken in consonance with this Order...PROVIDED FURTHER, that areas reserved/occupied by cultural communities shall first be identified and disposed of under the special provisions for the processing of rattan applications within areas reserved/occupied by cultural communities. Under Section 11, prospective bidders, including Indigenous People or Indigenous Cultural Communities (ICC), should submit prequalification requirements, particularly as stated in the provisions under Section 11.6. These are the following:

certifications from the Chieftain/Head of the cultural community, attested by the Provincial Governor/Mayor concerned, that the individual or members of the association is/are bonafide resident(s) of the area; certification from the pertinent government office concerned with affairs of Muslims or cultural communities, that is a duly recognized association; proofs of available capital and/or credit lines; supply contract/marketing agreement/rattan purchase order with existing rattan furniture or rattan craft manufacturers; and sworn statement authorizing DENR representative(s) to verify submitted information.

Lastly, another provision that deserves an attention is the basis of the award, as stated in Section 21 “The highest bidder is one who, having complied with the necessary requirements, offers the highest cash value of the rattan resources within the area, exclusive of license fees and other government charges...then, the license will be rewarded to the winning bidder”. This implies that IPs/ICCs who may possibly have no enough financial capacity to bid for a higher cash value of the rattan may not be awarded of such license.

In addition to the rules in regulating rattan resources, particularly with regards to IPs/ICCs, is the joint effort between DENR and NCIP under Memorandum Circular No. 2003-01 dated 31 October 2003, which aims to address issues affecting the rights of the IPs/ICCs in relation to the implementation of Indigenous Peoples Right Act and the Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) laws and policies [15]. It upholds the “rights of the IPs/ICCs to their ancestral lands and to benefit from the natural resources within it, to ensure their economic, social and cultural well-being”. In pursuant to this, and other related initiatives is the implementation and promulgation of the DENR-NCIP Joint Administrative Order No. 2008-01. This law provides the guidelines and procedures for the recognition, documentation, registration and confirmation of all Sustainable Traditional and Indigenous Forest Resources Management Systems and Practices (STIFRMSP) for IPs/ICCs in their ancestral domain.

The latter defined Indigenous Cultural Communities/Indigenous Peoples (ICC/IPs) as:

A group of people or homogenous societies identified by self-ascription and ascription by others, who have continuously lived as organized community on communally bounded and defined territory, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized such territories, sharing common bonds of language,

customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits...it shall likewise include peoples who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, at the time of conquest or colonization, or at the time of inroads of non-indigenous religions and cultures, or the establishment of present state boundaries, who retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, but who may have been displaced from their traditional domains or who may have resettled outside their ancestral domains.

In spite of its definition, it is important to highlight that the succeeding provisions of this Joint Implementing Rules and Regulations emphasized the ancestral domain as the territory of the IPs/ICCs. Apparently, it upholds the responsibility of the State to “protect and guarantee their right to pursue their (IPs/ICCs) economic, social and cultural well-being not only to ensure equitable sharing of benefits from the bounty of the earth but also to enable them to flourish...” and it “recognized the preferential rights of the IPs to benefit from the natural resources found within their ancestral lands/domains”. This simply implies that, IPs/ICCs living outside their ancestral domain are, although recognized, but not being prioritized. Considering further that this law recognized and acknowledged the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Right Act of 1998 (IPRA), which provisions emphasized more the IPs/ICCs living in their ancestral domain or territory – no other provisions intended for nomadic IPs [15].

The Mamanwa Mode of Subsistence

The Mamanwa, one of the Lumad in Mindanao, are situated near the boundary between Surigao and Agusan in the northeast part of Mindanao, Philippines. Despite migration from Mindanao to Samar and to Southern Leyte, their primary mode of subsistence which is *panguway* (rattan gathering) remains undisputed.

Wild grown *uway* or rattan is available in the mountain 2-3 hours hike from the Mamanwa community, once depleted they have to search farther, which will take them up to 5 hours of trekking through mountains. Harvesting of rattan is done manually with the use of *bandi*, a sickle-cell shape machete. They will clean the rattan, in a process called *lagusan*, in which they will cut off the leaves and spines, split in half and cut it in a specific length depending on the desired finished product. This will be bundled and hauled to the community using their bare hands. The steepness of the

mountain inhibits them to use carabao in hauling the bundled rattans. This limits them to bring the desired number of rattan needed for mass production. The processed rattan may go directly to the market as *sungkip* (use to tie thatch roof) or it will be weaved to create wicker hammock (*duyan*) or basket (*bukag*).



Figure 1. Weaving of rattan (Photo taken by the researcher)

Due to the lengthy period of time from gathering rattan to marketing they need to employ alternative sources of income for daily consumptions. Alternative sources of income vary in forms; depending on the weather, time of the year, and opportunities. Like for instance, during dry season women weave bed mat using *baliw* leaves. During summer they look for honey to sell. The Mamanwa also employ farming subsistence crops such as cocoyam, sweet potato, and vegetables. The surplus of these crops is sold in the barangay or nearby towns.

Generally, the Mamanwa are accustomed to *panguway*. Despite the distance from the mountain and a costly accessibility to the market, rattan has been so significant in sustaining their lives. However, sedentary settlement in the lowland caused a lot of changes to the traditional practices of the Mamanwa, it also affected their consumption patterns, their needs and in meeting those needs.

Sedentary settlement: demanding needs and accumulating wants

The sedentary settlement near Barangay Pinamudlan exposed them fully to the actual social, economic and political context of the mainstream society. This resulted to the following: recognition of the Local Government Unit or LGU, Government and NGO-sponsored development interventions increases, awareness of the market and opportunities. These lead to the registration of the Mamanwa as an organization

to DOLE in order to qualify as a recipient of Government funded projects, registration as voters and at the same time, it also gives them a chance to penetrate into the major social institution of the mainstream society. In addition, they accumulate knowledge and awareness on how to emulate the life of the dominant group which they regard as better than what they have. These includes educational attainment, more alternative sources of income, and the possible opportunities to economically hone their traditional mode of subsistence into a formal economy in order to increase income, which can be achieved by entering the rattan industry.

However, together with the changes in the physical and social environment of the Mamanwa are the changes in some aspect of their culture, particularly in their subsistence production, as well as in their consumption patterns. Acceptance of the mainstream and the willingness of the Mamanwa to penetrate and emulate the lives of the dominant group require them to adapt and cope, for them to be able to function in the mainstream system. Inevitably, their participation in the major social institutions of the mainstream, such as education, health, economy, and lifestyle resulted in a more demanding needs and accumulating wants. Adults become exposed to vices such as drinking alcohol and cockfighting, and they also started to purchase things they are not accustomed to like using cellphones and motorcycle. They also desire to have access to electricity in order to be able to use home electrical appliances. Teenagers are more inclined to using cellular phones and watching movies in the barangay, which requires spending money. Children who grow up interacting with the majority ethnic group aspire for things that the Mamanwa are not accustomed to, such as the kind of food to eat, the kind of clothes to wear and even the desire for the kind of professions that none of the adults had ever reached.

These behavioral changes among the Mamanwa demand a greater financial capacity for satisfaction. Thus, more sources of income are in dire need. As mentioned, they see an economic opportunity in the rattan industry. An opportunity to maximize profit in order to meet their existing needs and accumulating wants. But as a migrant Indigenous People, would it be viable?

The Decision and its Challenges

The Mamanwa maintained a strong social network with their relatives in the other parts of Leyte. Upon knowing that the Mamanwa group in Naval, Biliran

were engaged in rattan industry because they were able to secure a permit from DENR, my respondents become so eager to take advantage of such possibility and venture into the same opportunity. Decision theory argues that individuals are more likely to adopt behaviors that appear to be successful for others [16]. Considering that rattan gathering is part of their traditional practices, they wanted to develop and expand it in order to maximize profit; penetrating into a bigger market is one way of making it possible.

Prequalification requirements, such as: proof of available capital and/or credit lines and supply contract/marketing agreement/rattan purchase order with existing rattan furniture or rattan craft manufacturers are quite challenging for a very small community of Indigenous People who just started to engage themselves in the complex system of the mainstream.

The kind of rattan needed in the furniture industry is still quite abundant in the area of Southern Leyte where my respondents are located. The Mamanwa leader mentioned that they already have a target furniture manufacturer in Cebu City. But this prospect is uncertain considering that they do not have the exact name and contact of this manufacturer, they just rely on the fact that there are furniture manufacturers in Cebu that use rattan as raw material. More so, there is no business agreement that have taken place between my respondents and this certain manufacturer.

Apparently, the decision made is not based on an in-depth knowledge about the laws involved, the market and the processes that they will undertake. It was a decision made on uncertainties. In spite living in a world where the flow of information is unstoppable, the Mamanwa lack the information they needed in order to penetrate effectively into the system of the mainstream.

Where are the Mamanwa?

The use of the word “speck” here is not a way of downgrading the Mamanwa; rather it is a way of positioning them in the vast world of economics and politics. The status of this Mamanwa as a migrant has a great implication to the development of their livelihood. “Our own ethnicity becomes a constraint to our economic activities”[4]. Supposedly, the recognition of indigeneity (often goes with ethnicity) and concomitant privileges are manifestation of the development of human rights [17].

From the world economy of rattan industry to the national level, including the laws and policies involve

that seems to trickle-down to individuals – where can you find the Mamanwa? The answer is nowhere.

IPRA, which is promulgated in order to promote and protect the rights of the IPs is not culturally sensitive, considering that many IPs in the Philippines are nomads. In this regard, the provisions in DENR-NCIP Joint Administrative Order No. 2008-01 as well as that of DAO No. 04 which, supposedly are of great help for the Mamanwa to enjoy their rights as a citizen of the country, turns out to be useless. The leader of the Mamanwa himself keeps on repeating his sentiments that what they badly needed is capital in order to expand their income. Small-scale rattan gatherers, and IPs for that matter, are not well equipped to undergo the processes of the mainstream system. To quote “official laws and policies have significant consequences for small-scale producers; because they do not have a platform to influence these rules, thus removing the constraints to formality become difficult” [3]. Regulations and policies, and lack of knowledge thereof, are hurdles for small-scale producers engaged in the informal market who wanted to join the complexities of the formal market. More so, the processes they needed to undergo are quite cumbersome for them.

As a small-producer of rattan products, which can only transact to nearby towns in a minimal return is difficult to trace in the world market of rattan. However, staying informal can limit their ability to scale-up operations and mass production [7]. Nevertheless, this informal economy helps the Mamanwa to survive since time immemorial. Until such time that choices become available, yet unattainable for migrants like them. So, to continue the domino effect, no permit to plant and transport rattan means an inhibition of the Mamanwa to maximize their economic activities in order to meet their needs and wants. Furthermore, it means an inhibition for them to take part of the rattan industry in the Philippines, much more in the International Trade of rattan.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Decision-making serves the interest of the entire community if the ends are for the community’s satisfaction. The decision of the Mamanwa for economic expansion is driven by maximization of profit, because of increasing needs and accumulating wants as concomitant to their sedentary settlement at the expense of changing their cultural landscape.

These decisions are not constrained by the group’s social institutions or culture so to speak. Constrains

have something to do with the imposed rules or social institutions of the larger system. The larger system may not explicitly impede the Mamanwa to pursue their goals and interests, but I'd rather say that the system makes it difficult for such small-scale producers to engage into bigger and more complicated economic activities which the latter think may improve their well-being. Imposed policies and regulations are attainable by established, recognized and registered businesses, but it is not flexible enough to cater the needs and to consider the situations of small-scale producers. Apparently, even the agency delegated by the state such power to support Indigenous People is not equipped to carry its obligations. And the question goes, Is IPRA a flawed law implemented by a competent government agency? [18]

Presumably, the Mamanwa, wanted to embrace development by saying that technology and capital accumulation, Government programs and projects, and education are ways that will improve their well-being. If only options are available, they would choose not to go to the mountain just to earn. However, it is important to consider the reality that the Mamanwa are not living in their ancestral domain, do not own the land where they harvest rattan, and do not have enough capital and any form of formal business transactions with the dominant group. All these factors are correlated to the limitations of achieving economic progress.

There is no implicit denial of equal participation in the national economy, considering that the joint agreement between DENR and IPRA upholds indigenous people's rights to development. However, there is a subtle manifestation of inequality in the enjoyment of the rights to development among IPs. Therefore laws and policies to further develop rattan industry in the country and the laws provided as a way of recognizing the rights of the IPs are not of much help to migrant Indigenous People like the Mamanwa. In

this case, inequality of development expansion is correlated to the unequal enjoyment of rights provided by the state which supposed to be accessible to all Filipinos. Lastly, in the era of globalization, integrating domestic economy and society with the international economy and society are challenges that force developing countries [19]. Indeed, this system offers a lot of options but not all options are attainable by everyone. Unfortunately, small-producers who are having difficulties in converting their economic activities into a formal economy remain stagnant. But are significantly impacted by the expansion of global society and market economy [5]. They will remain a speck in the vast world of economics and politics. Looking at the trend of the market, the policies imposed that they need to follow, the "costs of formality" [3] that they are yet to experience and in tracing significant changes of the Mamanwa culture in the course of history, an expert would probably envisage where this group of people is heading to.

RECOMMENDATION

Thus, further Anthropological research is needed in order to fully understand the effects of environmental changes and integration of a small community, like the Mamanwa, into the larger system of the mainstream. Looking at rattan alone as a primary commodity is insufficient enough to locate the Mamanwa in the vast world of economy and politics. Considering nowadays that the lives of the Mamanwa does not revolve around rattan gathering anymore, rather, it become a mixture of various alternative sources of income together with various development interventions. Going beyond the limitations of this study would be helpful enough for policy makers and developers, specifically at the local level, to better address the need of this marginalized group and to better incorporate them to development initiatives.

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