

Ethnic Intermarriage, Community Involvement, Aspirations and Concept of Education among Agays of Lasam, Cagayan

Gilbert C. Magulod Jr., Ph.D.¹, Janilete R. Cortez, MAEd², Bernard P. Madarang, MAEd³
 Cagayan State University at Lasam,
 Lasam, Cagayan, Philippines
¹gilbertmagulod_rdecsulasam28@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research investigated the ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, aspirations and concept of education among the Agays of Lasam, Cagayan, Philippines with the end goal of proposing interventions for the extension program of Cagayan State University at Lasam. It employed ethnographic and descriptive survey research designs. Using informal retrospective interview and photo documentation techniques to the eighteen Agay-informants located in the three communities of Lasam, Cagayan. Findings of the study indicate that majority of the Agats were intermarried to Ilocano lowlanders. They married at the church, and they had had permanent habitation with an average of four children. Most of them were unable to attain formal education. The intermarried phenomenon of the Agays is attributed to their migration and economic engagement with the Ilocano lowlanders and other ethnic groups. Engagement in farming and paid labor was their livelihood, revealing low-income standard of living. In like manner, intermarried Agays had a moderate level of community participation particularly in barangay assemblies, voting, and training sponsored by agencies. A good life for them was measured by the provision of basic needs of their families. They manifested a high regard for the value of education to improve their standard of living, mainly to their children's future. The result of the study may serve as a basis for proposing a model of community development approach to improve the life quality of indigenous peoples in the Philippine countryside.

Keywords: *ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, education, aspirations*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines has so many ethnic and minority groups with an estimated 12–15 million indigenous peoples (IPs) belonging to 110 ethnolinguistic groups (Waddington, 2002). The indigenous peoples constitute 10–15% of the population of the country. They are mainly found in Northern Luzon and Mindanao, with some groups in the Visayas (UNDP, 2010). Among the major IPs are the Igorot of Northern Luzon, the Lumads of Mindanao, the Mangyans of Mindoro, and the Negritos living in different regions of the country. The Negritos migrated from mainland Asia and settled in the Philippines around 30,000 years ago (Cariño, 2010).

The Agays are indigenous people living in the dispersed isolated mountainous regions of Luzon, Philippines. The intermarriage of Agays to other ethnic groups like the Ilokanos and Kalingas is a good point to explore. The intermarriage reared different perspectives and speculations in their way of life along educational, economic, political and religious aspects. Moreover, their socio-civic involvement and aspirations being intermarried

to other ethnic groups differ from their original cultural practices when they live in a community. In the study of Madriaga and Lacanlale (2011), they noted that Aetas being a minority group are social, politically, and educationally suppressed. Like any other minority groups, they are marginalized. They have limited or no access to government services and only minimal job opportunities are available to them. Ocampo and Ocampo (2014) affirmed that because of the constant interactions of the Aetas with other ethnic groups, their ways of living, especially economic survival, is starting to change.

According to Tamayao (2011), in the Philippines, one of the channels where different ethnic groups come into contact with one another was migration. It plays an important role in creating opportunities in social connection like ethnic intermarriages. As in all intermarriages, he further posited that this phenomenon meant not only joining another family or another set of life-histories but also involving the adoption of an element of a different culture.

In the parlance of the law, Republic Act No. 8371, or "The Indigenous Peoples'

Rights Act of 1997," is "an act to recognize, protect and promote the rights of indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples, created a National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, established implementing mechanisms, appropriated funds therefore, and for other purposes (Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress, 1997)."

Putting emphasis that portion of the history of Lasam is the existence of the ethnic group Agays who are considered as early settlers in the mountainous part of the municipality. Their intermarriage and socio-civic involvement with other ethnic groups and their aspirations provide a sound basis of interest to add to the limited studies on the Agays' way of life.

Intermarriage between the Agays and Ilocanos, Ilonggos, or Kalinga in Lasam is quite interesting to explore bearing its significance that those intermarried couples will form the basic unit of society as a family. The need of literature to document the way of living along educational, economic, political, social and religious practices of the intermarried Agays provide some baseline data to development planners and implementers in tailoring initiatives to uplift their standard of living.

The intermarriage phenomenon of the Agays with other cultural groups is worth investigating as it will serve as a social mechanism in influencing the other members of this minority group in the implementation of effective programs and projects intended to elevate their present standard of living. Likewise, this study will provide baseline data to development planners and implementers regarding the educational, economic, political, social and religious.

This study hopes to contribute to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regarding the country's needs of funding initiatives or programs anchored on the preservation, revitalization, and development of indigenous groups like the Agays in Northern Cagayan. It shall also likewise provide data to the National Commission for the Culture and the Arts (NCCA) regarding the existence of Agay communities. Further, the Cagayan State University-Lasam, with the Agay communities as one of its community extension service areas, could adapt literacy, livelihood and health intervention programs for them. Pioneering this study will also offer a wider

perspective on conducting more comprehensive studies on the Agays of Lasam, Cagayan.

This study intended to examine the ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, aspirations and concept of education of Agays in rural communities. Implications of the study present study will provide directions on how to help them in their communities.

This study intended to explore the ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, aspirations, and the educational concept among Agays in Lasam, Cagayan. Likewise, it described the personal characteristics of the informants, the reasons of intermarriage, their involvement in social and civic activities in their communities, aspirations, and regard for the value of education. This study also recommended interventions on project development for institutionalization by concerned stakeholders.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed ethnographic and quantitative descriptive survey research designs as it uncovered the ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, aspirations and concept of education among the Lasam Agays. According to Frankel and Wallen (2006), the emphasis in ethnographic research is on documenting or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others. In like manner, the quantitative descriptive survey provided details on the personal and work characteristics of the informants. Navarro and Santos (2011) described the survey method as having the purpose of collecting detailed, factual information describing existing phenomena.

The unstructured interview technique and the standard participant observer method gathered the data for the study. The interview was used as the primary tool in gathering data, with the camera to record necessary events. Upon writing the facts gathered from the informants, the researchers compared their statements with what they had in the field notes. Participation observer technique was used to get information from the informants.

Research Locale

The study setting was in the Municipality of Lasam, Cagayan. This study

covered the three Agay communities in the barangays of Peru, Sicalao, and Cabatacan West. Lasam is an agricultural community situated in the north-western portion of Cagayan province. It is circumscribed on the northwest by the Municipality of Allacapan, Cagayan and Flora, Apayao; on the east by the Cagayan River and Gattaran, Cagayan; on the northeast by the municipality of Lal-lo; on the south by Sto. Nino, Cagayan; and on the southwest by the municipality of Rizal, Cagayan. The Municipality of Lasam has an aggregate land area of approximately 23,400 or 234 square kilometers. This is evenly distributed among its 30 barangays.

Participants

The participants of the study were eighteen intermarried Agays purposively chosen through site selection approach guided by these inclusion criteria: 1) the respondents must be a full-blooded Agay; and 2) must be married with children. Participation of the informants was voluntary. The purposive sampling was utilized to identify the informants of the study. It is a form of sampling in which the process of selection of the sample is based on the judgment of the researchers based on the criteria set in the study. The researchers chose the Agay who had met these criteria to be the informants of the study. They responded based on the nature of their experiences and willingness to participate. For ethical considerations, the respondents were informed that the interviews were recorded. Autonomy, confidentiality anonymity, and reciprocity were observed by the researchers.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics of the Informants

Table 1. Type of Intermarriage

Intermarriage Type	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Ilocano Husband-Agay Wife	6	33
Kalinga Husband-Agay Wife	1	6
Igorot Husband-Agay Wife	1	6
Ilocana Wife-Agay Husband	6	33
Kalinga Wife-Agay Husband	2	11
Igorot Wife-Agay Husband	2	11
Total	18	100%

Most informants had intermarried Ilocano lowlanders. Six (33%) of the respondents were Ilocano husbands married to Agay wives. The other six (33%) were Ilocano wives married to Agay husbands. Two (11%) Kalinga wives married Agay husbands, and another two (11%) were Igorot wives who married Agay husbands. There was one (6%) Kalinga husband with Agay wife, and one (6%) Igorot husband with Agay wife. This shows that there was a dominant intermarriage between Agays and Ilocanos. This is attributed to the reason that many Agays in Lasam were mainstreamed with the Ilocano lowlanders, leading to the interaction and socialization of both groups with one another. Their trade relationships and exposure to each other influenced their intermarriage phenomenon. Madriaga and Lacanlale (2011) affirmed that the intermarriage of *kulot* (curly hair, refers to Aetas) and *unats* (straight hair, refers to lowlanders) was because of their co-existence in the community.

Table 2. Number of Years Married

Years Married	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
5 years below	5	28
5-10 years	8	44
11-15 years	2	11
16-20 years	1	6
21-25 years	1	6
26 and above	1	6
Total	18	100%

Majority of the intermarriages were five to ten years (8 or 44%), while only 5, or 28%, were married five years and below. Intermarriages of 16-20 years, 21-25 years, and 26 and above were fewer with only one informant for each bracket. The data show that most of the informants were married for 5 to 10 years.

Table 3. Type of Habitation

Habitation Type	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Temporary	2	11
Semi-permanent	4	22
Permanent	12	67
Total	18	100%

As revealed in Table 3, most of the respondents were already having a permanent habitation, with a percentage of 67%. Twenty-two percent had a semi-permanent settlement, and 11% was settling temporarily in their present habitation. Based on the observation

during the data-gathering, informants having permanent habitation were Agays intermarried with Ilocanos. The permanent houses of the intermarried Agays were concrete and galvanized-roofed with rooms inclusive of practically designed kitchens and appliances such as television and radios. This signifies that most of the intermarried Agays were adapting the way of living of Ilocano lowlanders.

Table 4. Type of Union

Union Type	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Church marriage	8	44
Civil marriage	4	22
Cohabitation	6	33
Total	18	100%

With the highest percentage of 44, eight intermarried Agay members had church weddings solemnized by a pastor or priest. Four, or 22%, had civil weddings through the mass wedding conducted by the municipal mayor, while 6, or 33%, were cohabitating. Most of the Agays married at the church were active born-again Christians. This finding implies that through the social interaction of the Agays with the lowlander Ilocanos and other ethnic groups, their traditional way of marriage or wedding was not practiced.

Table 5. Educational Attainment of Husbands

Educational Attainment	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Unschooling	4	22
Elementary Undergraduate	7	39
Elementary Graduate	3	17
High School Undergraduate	4	22
High School Graduate	1	6
Total	18	100%

Most of the husbands of the intermarried Agays were elementary undergraduates with 7 or 39% of them. Unschooling and high school undergraduate husbands shared the same percentage, 22% or 4 respondents. Only three, or 17%, were elementary graduates, while only one, 6%, was a high school graduate. Low access to education and finances were reasons of the low level of education among the informants.

As to the level of education of the intermarried wives, most of them were

elementary undergraduate (7 or 39%). There were five (28%) unschooled, four (22%) elementary undergraduate, one (2%) high school undergraduate, and one (2%) high school graduate. Likewise, low access to education and finances were reasons of a low level of education among the informants.

Table 6. Educational Attainment of Wives

Educational Attainment	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Unschooling	5	28
Elementary Undergraduate	7	39
Elementary Graduate	4	22
High School Undergraduate	1	2
High School Graduate	1	2
Total	18	100%

Most of the intermarried Agays had three to four children (10 or 56%). Five, or 28%, of them, had 1-2 children; two, or 11%, had 5-6; and only one had seven to eight children. This also shows that four was the average number of children.

Table 7. Number of Children

Number of Children	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
1-2	5	28
3-4	10	56
5-6	2	11
7-8	1	6
9-above	0	0
Total	18	100%

Table 8. Sources of Livelihood

Sources of Livelihood	Frequency (n=18)	Percent
Paid Labor	10	56
Farming	6	33
Poultry Raising	2	11
Total	18	100%

Paid labor was the common livelihood of the intermarried with 56%. Thirty-three percent engaged in farming, while 11% in poultry-raising. Both husband and wife did the work. They helped each other in the cultivation of their farm. All respondents had their animals like chickens, pigs, carabaos, and ducks as alternative sources of their daily income. The intermarried Agays also planted rice, potato,

taro, banana, and vegetables.

Reasons of the Agays in Intermarrying

The primary reason initiating the intermarriage phenomenon of the informants was migration due to economic motives. Most said, "*Idi bimmaba kami manipod iti banbantay nga ayan min, nakita nak ni lakay ko ket nagin-nayaten kami metten idi mapmapan kami maki tantandan kadakwada (When we migrated to the lowlands from the mountains, I was spotted by my husband, so he married me because we work with them in paid labor).*" This implies that a major factor of the intermarriage is through migration. Tamayao (2011) noted that migration played an important role in creating opportunities for social connection like ethnic intermarriage.

Another reason was love and courtship, as they stated, "*Inar-arem nak met ken agin-inayat kami (He courted me, and we love each other).*" The informants also revealed poverty as another factor for intermarriage, and they would like to have a good life by marrying an Ilocano lowlander. An informant said, "*Naki-asawa nak ti Ilocano ta inarem nak met ken ammok nga adda taltalon da ta ngamin makitantandan kami idi kadakuada isu nga nakiasawa nakon (I married an Ilocano because he courted me, and I know they own a rice farm because my family works for them through paid labor that's why I married him).*"

The intermarriage between Agays and members of other groups happened because of their migration to the lowlands due to economic difficulty, providing them a greater contact with other ethnic groups. They were aware that intermarriage was not only joining another family. This also means the assimilation of different cultures in which a culture is being dominated by another.

Community Involvement of the Intermarried Agays

In terms of community involvement, the intermarried Agays occasionally attended barangay assembly, voting during elections, and training sponsored by the local government units and other agencies.

As voters, they were also aware that when choosing candidates during elections, the platforms should be considered. They voted for candidates who they think can help them during calamities. As an informant said, "*Nu agbotos kami pilyem mi met dagiti ammo*

mi nga makatulong kadakami aglalo no adda kalkalamidad (When we vote, we choose the candidates who we think can help us during calamities)."

They also had sentiments, stating that politicians only know them during elections. They were being fetched to vote at the elementary schools. The politicians then gave them rice or money, as an informant narrated, "*No dadduma sada kami laeng am-ammo dagiti politico no panawen ti panagbobotos, umay dakami nukwa daw-asen tapnu mapan kami makabotos. Ikkan dakami met nukwa iti bagas wenno kwarta (Sometimes, politicians only knew us during elections. They fetched us from our communities to vote. In turn, they gave us rice and money)*"

Many of them said that they seldom attended government-sponsored programs because there were times that they were engaged in paid labor when the barangay captain calls for a meeting. Most also said they danced during fiestas as requested by the barangay captain. An informant said, "*Makisal-sala kami met no barangay fiesta ta ibaga met nukwa da kapitan nga makisala kami (We danced during barangay fiesta because we were requested by our barangay captain).*"

Concept of Education

The intermarriage also manifested educational value, particularly for their children. They disliked that their children would experience what they had experienced. An informant said, "*Pagbasbasaen mi annak mi tapno addan to met napintas nga masakbayan da. Han mi met kayat nga mapadasan da dagiti napadasan mi gapo ta saan kami met nakaadal (We send our children to school because we would like them to have a good life in the future, and we do not like that they will experience what we had experienced because we did not finish studying).*"

There were also times that they had to decide to quit sending their children to school because of financial reason. An informant said, "*Nu dadduma marigatan kami, pagsardeng mi palang dagiti anak mi aglalo no adda agsakit kadakuada san mi met kaya a igastusan ida (There are times when we are short on money we let our children stop schooling to finance other concerns).*"

The Agays also believed that education is one of the best ways for them to escape poverty. An informant affirmed, "*Mamati kami nga babaen iti panagadal*

dagitoy annak mi ket maddaan da ti nasayaat nga biag tapno saan danto met agrigrigat kasla kadakami (We believed that through education of our children, they will have a good future, and they will not experience the kind of poverty we are experiencing now)."

The statement "*Ammomi nga responsibilidad mi nga nagannak iti agpabasa kadagit annak mi* (We are aware that it's our responsibility to send our children to school)" proves that the intermarried Agays were aware of such responsibility. Once the children attend formal education, they would become literate as they said, "*Kayat mi nga masursurwan da nga agbasa kada agsurat tapno nu makalpas da met addanto met ti napintas nga trabaho da* (We would like our children to learn how to read and write so that when they finish schooling, they will have a good job)."

The respondents also viewed education as an investment of their children. Thus, they also tried to allocate money for their children's schooling, setting aside a significant amount from their daily wage from labor for the daily allowance of their children. Moreover, David (2011) found that despite the initiatives of the government to address the needs of the Aeta groups, access to education has not been well catered to. Most Aeta children have been neglected when it comes to education, that only a few of them were attending formal schooling. Although public schools are free, parents could not send their children because of economic constraints.

Aspirations

Intermarried Agays wanted to provide their family the basic needs, which also make them happy. They said, "*Naragsak kami nu maited mi dagiti inaldaw nga kaspapulan ti pamilya mi aglalo kadagiti annak mi nga agbasa* (We are happy if we can provide the basic needs of our family particularly the needs of our children in going to school)."

They also aspired to send all their children to school and finish schooling, as an informant said, "*Ar-arapaapen mi met nga mapaadal mi dagiti annak mi* (We aspire to send our children to school)." The aspirations of the intermarried Agays were similar to those of other Ilocano families. For them, sending their children to school might bring them satisfaction in life.

Additionally, more decent homes, clothes, home furniture, and amenities also made them happy. Wellness, for the Agays,

meant that peace existed in their community. This means that absence of conflict among family members and community members was also an indicator of a good life to them. They believed that they would achieve a bad life if they were in bad terms with other people.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the ethnic intermarriage of indigenous people particularly the Agays of Lasam, Cagayan is attributed to their economic engagement with other cultural groups. They were in a low-income standard of living caused by low level of education as a consequence; therefore, the intermarried couples had a low level of community involvement. It is also interesting to find that their aspirations in life were not far different from those of the ordinary families that are having a good life attained by the provision of basic needs to their children and of good education to improve their standard of living. It is therefore evidential that the intermarriage phenomenon of the Agays with other cultural groups eventually leads to the continued change of the cultural way of living of the Agays.

With ethnic intermarriage, community involvement, aspirations, and the concept of education among Agays of Lasam, Cagayan, the following should be considered:

1. An implication to the extension program of Cagayan State University at Lasam, the following are proposed: (1.1) Initiate extension programs that are sensitive to the intermarried Agay members; (1.2) implement programs aimed at improving the farming and other livelihood skills of the informants; (1.3) provision of work opportunities in the community may help them continue sending their children to school; (1.4) implement literacy program.
2. Provision of scholarships to the children of intermarried Agays should be initiated through the local government unit and other agencies.
3. Continuous involvement in community will be strengthened through the support of barangay officials, church members, and other agencies.
4. This intermarriage of Agays should be considered by development thinkers to review and revise their concepts and models for community development intended for IPs.
5. Other studies pertaining to the material and non-material culture of the

intermarried Agays particularly on their ethnic identity, core values, and the role of linguistic and cultural capital should be conducted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the University Research Office of Cagayan State University for the research fund. Acknowledgment is also due to the University President, Dr. Urdujah A. Tejada, CESO II, and to the Campus Executive Officer of Cagayan State University at Lasam, Dr. Benjamin B. Arao Sr.

REFERENCES

- Andrada, L. (2007). The secrets of Agays of Flora, Apayao, *DENR Research Journal*.
- Balilia, V. & McHenry, J. A. (2013). Indigenous AetaMagbukún self-identity, sociopolitical structures, and self-determination at the local level in the Philippines. *Journal of Anthropology*, 1-6. Retrieved from <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/janthro/2013/391878/>.
- Canay, P. C. (2011). Habermasian discourse on Bugkalots' customary laws on property and inheritance. *Cagayan State University Research Journal*.
- David, M. D. (2011). Aeta Mag-anchi's Cultural History, Concept of Time and Territoriality: Its Implications for Education. Presented at the 2011 International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanity. IPEDR Vol. 5, Singapore. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/298663272/Aeta-Mag-Antsi-s-Cultural-History>.
- De Vera, D. (2007). Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines. Presented at the RNIP Regional Assembly, Hanoi, Vietnam. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1a69/faf7a559cd10cdeaf2bd6aebf59d3c414ea5.pdf>.
- Dove, M. R. (2006). Indigenous people and environmental politics. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35, pp. 191-208. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123235>.
- Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education*, 6th Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Geronimo M. C., Cabansag M. C. & Reyes A. S. (2016). Beliefs and practices on utilization and conservation of resources among the Agay of North Sierra Madre Mountain System, Philippines. *Asia Pacific Journal of Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.mindamas-journals.com/index.php/educare/article/download/749/721>
- Madriaga, G. T. & Lacanlale, E. P. (2011). Life Pattern of Intermarried Aetas and Lowlanders in Barangay Sta. Juliana, Capas, Tarlac. Presented at the 2011 International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanity. IPEDR, Vol. 5. Received from <http://www.ipedr.com/vol5/no2/64-H10170.pdf>.
- Molintas, J. M. (2004). The Philippine indigenous peoples' struggle for land and life: Challenging legal texts. *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 21(1). Retrieved from <http://arizona-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Molintas.pdf>.
- Ocampo R., & Ocampo R. (2014). The economic life of the Negritos of Luna, Apayao. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2(1). Retrieved from <http://oaji.net/articles/2014/1543-1418695093.pdf>.
- Republic Act No. 8371. "The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997. Retrieved from <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1997/10/29/republic-act-no-8371/>.
- Tamayao, A. (2011). Linguistic capital in Filipino ethnic intermarriage and identity: A Bourdieuan's analysis. *CSU Research Journal*.
- Tindown D. C. (2016). The economic life of the Aetas of Northern Philippines. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 19(4). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319544217_The_Economic_Life_of_Aetas_of_Northern_Philippines.
- Tuyor, J. B. et al. (2007). Indigenous Peoples Rights Act: Legal and Institutional Frameworks, Implementation and Challenges in the Philippines. Discussion Papers, East Asia and Pacific Region, Social Development, Rural Development, Natural Resources and Environment Sectors. Washington DC: WB.