

From Barter to Subsistence: The Socio-Economic Transformation of Kalanguya Livelihoods to Commercial Farming in Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the socioeconomic transformation of the Kalanguya people in Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya, documenting their transition from a traditional subsistence and barter economy to market-integrated commercial farming. Historically sustained by the barter system and swidden farming, the community is increasingly adopting cash-crop agriculture driven by the need for monetary income to cover modern expenses like education and medicine. The research utilizes a qualitative multidisciplinary approach, including in-depth interviews with community elders to capture oral histories and thematic analysis of livelihood changes. Findings indicate that while commercialization has increased profits and created new professional opportunities, it has also introduced environmental risks from chemical use, market marginalization by third-party buyers, and a weakening of traditional communal labor systems such as Ubbo and Da-ngah. Despite these challenges, the Kalanguya demonstrate cultural resilience by actively documenting their heritage and adapting traditional values to modern economic realities. The study recommends policy interventions to enhance fair market access through cooperatives and to formally support indigenous communal systems within development projects.

Keywords: Kalanguya-Ikalahan, Socioeconomic Transformation, Commercial Agriculture, Market Integration, Environmental Degradation

INTRODUCTION

The Kalanguya people, often identified in anthropological literature as Ikalahan and sometimes referred to by their language, Kallahan (Himes, 1998), constitute a significant Austronesian ethnic group in the Philippines. While they are closely associated with the Cordillera Administrative Region (Arsenio and Stallsmith, 2015), their core population spans a contiguous area encompassing the southern parts of Nueva Vizcaya particularly Santa Fe and Kayapa, Nueva Ecija, and Pangasinan (Gaspar, 2015). Historically a prosperous tribe, the Kalanguya were able to sustain a rich culture and tradition including practices like the baki or prayer to God and keleng or cañao feasts through a profound reliance on oral tradition (Tindaan, 2013).

This traditional system was characterized by subsistence agriculture, which ensured self-sufficiency, and economic transactions that primarily relied on Hinna-lat, a system of barter exchange where staple goods like sweet potatoes and vegetables were traded directly rather than using money (santafe-nv.gov.ph). This deep-seated traditional economy, coupled with a cultural fabric rooted in ancestral influence and non-verbal folklore like dance and performance (Tallungan et al., 2023), is now undergoing a critical transformation. The movement away from this sustainable, non-monetary system toward market-driven commercial farming represents the core concern of this study, as it forces the Kalanguya to negotiate modernization while confronting the potential loss of their traditional ecological knowledge and community cohesion.

The shift from the traditional subsistence model to market-driven commercial farming introduces a complex set of trade-offs affecting the Kalanguya's social-ecological system. Economically, the transformation offers the promise of increased cash flow and higher farm gate values from cultivating high-value cash crops. However, this advantage is offset by severe risks, including exposure to market volatility, potential indebtedness due to high chemical input costs, and increased pressure on labor. Socio-culturally, the move toward intensive

individualism in commercial agriculture directly weakens the traditional systems of reciprocal labor, such as *Ubbo* (labor sharing), and pressures the privatization of communal lands, threatening the authority of customary laws and potentially leading to intra-community land disputes.

Most critically, the commitment of land to cash crops jeopardizes food security, forcing the community to rely on the market for staple foods that were once self-provided, while simultaneously fueling environmental degradation (Dagli, 2022). The continuous, intensive cultivation replaces the sustainable practice of long forest fallow cycles, accelerating soil nutrient depletion, encouraging monoculture, and increasing reliance on synthetic inputs that harm both human and environmental health. Understanding these competing forces, the drive for economic opportunity versus the erosion of resilience and customary cohesion is the fundamental justification for studying this socio-economic transformation in Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya.

Statement of the Objectives

This study aims to thoroughly investigate the socioeconomic transformation of Kalanguya livelihoods from traditional barter and subsistence farming to commercial agriculture in Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya. Specifically, the research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the driving forces (both past and present) behind the shift to commercial agriculture.
2. Determine the major socioeconomic changes resulting from this economic transition.
3. Assess the impact of commercial farming on the traditional Kalanguya social structures and cultural practices.

Significance of the Study

This study's significance begins with its vital contribution to the socio-economic history and cultural memory of the Kalanguya people. This research provides the first dedicated analysis of the trajectory from the traditional economy, characterized by self-sufficiency, non-monetary exchange specifically the *Hinna-lat* or barter system, and subsistence farming to a market-integrated, cash-crop economy, thereby creating a valuable chronological record of their economic evolution.

Furthermore, by meticulously detailing the traditional system's mechanisms, such as the reciprocal labor system or *ubbo* and customary resource management, the study helps to preserve cultural and economic memory that is rapidly fading under the influence of modernization. This documentation serves as an essential resource for future generations of Kalanguya, researchers, and anthropologists. Finally, the findings offer practical guidance for policymaking, advocating for policies that promote sustainable agro-ecological practices, like organic vegetable farming or strengthened agroforestry that integrate traditional knowledge with modern techniques, ultimately achieving both sustainable economic gain and environmental protection for the community.

Scope and Delimitation

This study focuses specifically on analyzing the economic and social history of the Kalanguya ethnolinguistic group's livelihood practices in Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya, spanning the broad historical period from the mid-20th century to the present day. The thematic scope centers on the profound socioeconomic transformation from traditional subsistence and barter *Hinna-lat* to contemporary market-integrated commercial farming, including the resulting cultural and social impacts on the community structure and resource management. However, the findings are subject to clear limitations: The research is strictly localized to the Kalanguya community in Bacneng and cannot be generalized to other Indigenous Cultural Communities across Northern Luzon. The investigation into traditional economic practices is heavily constrained by the limited availability of written archives or historical documents. This scarcity necessitates a strong reliance on oral history gathered through key informant interviews with elders and leaders, introducing potential vulnerability to subjective interpretations and personal biases regarding past events. While the study successfully identifies

patterns of environmental decline, it lacks empirical, quantitative measurements such as technical soil testing data to determine the exact extent of soil exhaustion or nutrient depletion caused by modern farming.

Study Locale

The locale of this study is the barangay of Bacneng, Santa Fe, Nueva Vizcaya, which serves as a critical case study area situated within the Kalahan Ancestral Domain (KAD) at an elevation of approximately 540 meters. This setting is ideal because it is where the conflict between Indigenous tradition and market integration is most pronounced, largely due to its transformation into a major trade hub following the opening of the Maharlika Highway.

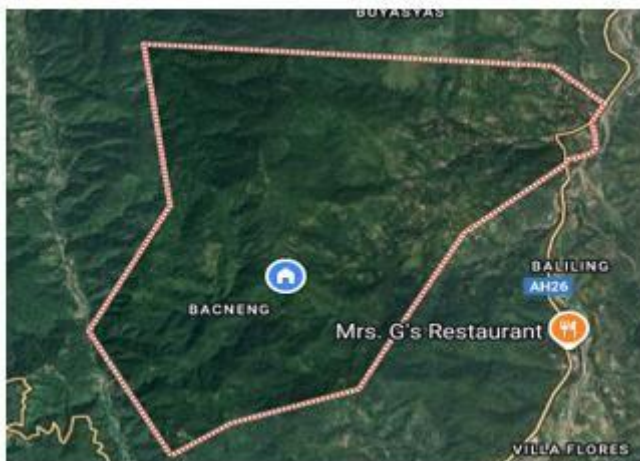


Fig.1 Conceptual layout of Santa Fe highlighting Bacneng and its proximity to the Maharlika Highway (AH26) trade corridor.

Source: Google Map

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Data Sources

In documenting the comprehensive and robust analysis of the socio-economic transformation of the Kalanguya, the researcher followed a multidisciplinary approach:

Qualitative Assessment of Livelihood Capital Changes

This serves as the core method, evaluating non-numerical data primarily gathered through detailed interviews to interpret the community's socio-economic circumstances.

In-Depth Interviews and Thematic Analysis

Interviews measure changes in Sustainable Livelihood Framework Capitals, specifically checking changes in financial assets, physical assets, and quantifiable shifts in livelihood practices in Bacneng. The qualitative data is analyzed using thematic analysis to capture the descriptive perspectives of respondents regarding their most pressing concerns.

Sampling Strategy and Oral History Dependency

The research relies heavily on Purposive Sampling to identify key informants within the Kalanguya community. The qualitative participants include Community Elders and Traditional Leaders, who are vital for documenting the specifics of the Hinna-lat barter system, customary laws, and the historical functionality of traditional mechanisms like Ubbo.

These oral testimonies serve as the primary foundational evidence for this research. Readers and future researchers must note that this introduces potential subjectivity and personal bias into the interpretation of past economic events. Furthermore, the assessment of environmental decline remains grounded in these oral histories, as empirical, quantitative soil testing was outside the scope of the current methodology.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Kalanguya-Ikalahan

The Kalanguya-Ikalahan have a history of long continuous possession and occupation of their ancestral domain where they were already cultivating the soil and hunting in the forest before the Spanish set foot in this land. However, records show that history of the Kalanguya-Ikalahan Tribe could not be traced because Filipinos born in the Gran Cordillera Central are generally known as Igorots, Igorotes, and Ygolot which comprises of many tribes like the Isnegs, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kankanaey, Ibaloi and Kalanguya. But historically they all have one thing in common: their ancestors resisted assimilation into the Spanish Empire for three centuries. At the time of the American invasion, they were still living in a pre-literate society, and since they kept no written records, it is not possible today to write a comprehensive definitive history of the Igorot people.

The history of the sub-tribe Kalanguya-Ikalahan can be traced back to the Spanish period during the missions of Ituy in 1854 under Commandante Dovilla, who was sent by General Don Arandia to spread the Christian faith and to establish the Civil Government to the non-Christian tribes. The first Kalanguya-Ikalahan settlement found in the north was Yangyangan, now known as Imugan. This is where the famous Villa Verde Trail is located; it was named after Father Juan Villa Verde, a Dominican Priest, who insisted on its construction. It served as an important means of transportation from 1885 to 1910, linking the Ilocos Region and Cagayan Valley.

Census figures for 1876 show that Nueva Vizcaya has 32, 209 population with 32,184 “indios” as ordinarily called by Spain of the indigenous population but the Igorots never accepted the term thus they were collectively referred to as tribus independientes in the sense that they were composed of independent tribes; only in the sense that they were composed of independent people, not that they were organized into independent provinces. Around 1890 a series of mountain jurisdiction was formed in a major effort to control the non-Christian groups and among those established was the Commandancia of Kayapa in which the settlement of Imugan was included. Until in 1901 Governor General Francis Burton Harrison founded the Municipal District of Imugan by virtue of Executive Order No.39. (Philippine ICCA Consortium)

The Traditional Economic Baseline

According to the respondents, the Kalanguya’s traditional way of life centers on self-sufficiency and mutual dependence, supported by an economic system highly adapted to the mountainous environment.

Inum-an (Swidden Farming)

The foundation of this system is Inum-an, the indigenous term for swidden farming. In this practice, they employ shifting cultivation on mountain slopes, crucially applying a fallow period of two to three years to ensure the land’s fertility is maintained and never left barren, reflecting a sophisticated, sustainable practice. While sweet potato is the primary crop, rice is a specialized prestige crop often grown on smaller terraces called payaw. Other essential crops like yams, corn, and various beans are also planted in their fields for subsistence.

Hinna-lat (Barter System)

When the community had surplus food, transactions relied on Hinna-lat, their traditional exchange system. This involved the direct barter of goods, such as trading sweet potatoes or different kinds of vegetables with neighbors, serving as payment and ensuring that everyone in the community had the food they needed without the use of money.

Contemporary Forces Driving the Transition

The shift from this sustainable, barter-based economy to commercial farming is propelled by a confluence of internal needs and external modernization pressures.

Financial Imperatives and Livelihood Need

According to the respondents, the primary catalyst for change is the need for cash income to meet modern expenses, such as education and medicine, pushing the community away from a simple, sustainable economic system to one driven by commercial motivations. The transformation to commercial agriculture is often a direct response to the livelihood need to overcome a significant poverty rate and secure a more reliable and substantial source of income to meet basic needs, such as food to eat three times a day, medicine in times of sickness, and clothing.

Market Integration and Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure has been crucial in accelerating the transition. The opening of Farm-to-Market roads and the improvement of road networks, including the pivotal Maharlika Highway, have physically connected previously isolated Kalanguya communities to the mainstream economy and markets. This infrastructure transformed Bacneng into an important trade hub and made it feasible to transport perishable commercial goods to larger urban centers. This access, along with the establishment of trade centers like the Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Trading (NVAT), enabled the community to prioritize the cultivation of high-value vegetables for profit over their traditional subsistence staples.

Modernization and Perceived Value

The increasing demand for cash, coupled with the overall influence of modernization, connects the Kalanguya to wider opportunities for commercial activity. The community perceives the transition to growing high-value crops as a strategic move toward social mobility. This shift is not merely about survival, but about a perceived value that associates modern agriculture with progress and better education for the next generation.

As noted by Li (2014), highland communities often view commercial farming as a necessary entry point into the modern world, providing them with the cash required for healthcare and children's education. Furthermore, Dressler (2009) suggests that modernization creates a new value system where high-value crop production is equated with social progress. However, as Eder (1999) points out, this perceived value is often driven by cash-necessity; once a community is connected to regional markets via infrastructure, they must engage in commercial activity simply to afford basic services that were once managed through communal sharing.



Fig. 3 The left picture showing the drawn shots of Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal (NVAT) Posted by NVAT FB Pages. The right picture showing USAID SPEED Chief of Party Vice Catudio, USAID Philippines Deputy Mission Director Rebekah Eubanks, and Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Terminal (NVAT) General

Manager Gilbert Cumila hold wombok cabbages from farmer-traders. Source: <https://ph.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2023/09/09-11-2023-PR-U.S.>

Socioeconomic Outcomes and Challenges

Economic Impacts and New Opportunities

Evaluation of the external environment is vital for the development of every business, serving as the foundation for enterprises to make wise decisions (Shtal, et al., 2018) and as a trustworthy tool to assess gaps that have occurred in every enterprise (Pukla and Mohammad, 2021). Enterprise performance is impacted by how the external environment appears to income-generating enterprises through opportunities and threats (Hasbi, 2021).

According to the respondents, the shift toward modern income-generating methods has led the Kalanguya community to place a higher value on commercial gardening, as it now serves as the primary source for their daily necessities. This economic transition has resulted in tangible improvements to their quality of life, enabling families to build concrete houses and provide formal education for their children, opportunities that were previously out of reach due to the hardships of traditional subsistence living. The shift has also opened up new career pathways, with Kalanguya individuals moving into new employment roles as skilled workers or professionals. Fundamentally, the economic transition is marked by the replacement of the need for barter exchange Hin-na-lat with monetary transactions, fully integrating the community into the national economic system.

Environmental and Economic Marginalization

Despite the new economic opportunities, the shift introduces critical challenges, particularly concerning sustainability and market fairness. To compete in the open market, indigenous farmers are often forced to use chemicals or overexploit resources, thereby jeopardizing their long-standing traditional sustainability.

Market and Middlemen Vulnerability

Market access is often limited and dictated by third parties. This dependence means outside buyers and middlemen control prices and take most of the profit, leaving the local producers with little control over pricing and very little money. This exacerbates economic and social marginalization, leaving many families poor despite their efforts (AIPP Foundation, 1992).

The Environmental Trap

To make ends meet and pay off their debts, farmers are forced to push their land too hard, planting more crops and using a lot of harsh chemical fertilizers and pesticides. While it offers a way to earn money, it is actually hurting the land they depend on, creating a critical socioeconomic trap that threatens both the environment and the community's future.

The National Action Plan warns that soil degradation is a nationwide threat affecting 5.2 million hectares and cutting productivity by up to 50% (NAP, 2024). This crisis is being felt directly by Kalanguya farmers who are forced into a cycle of chemical dependency to survive. Because market prices are controlled by third parties, farmers must overexploit their land to pay off debts, leading to rapid soil exhaustion and the loss of traditional sustainability.

The community's oral evidence powerfully documents this environmental decline, this study currently lacks empirical, quantitative soil analysis data to measure the precise scientific extent of this soil exhaustion. Without urgent intervention and a shift toward coordinated soil protection (Atienza, et al., 2008), the Kalanguya people risk losing the very land that defines their livelihood and cultural identity.

Cultural Impacts and Resilience

The shift from traditional barter to commercial farming has not only changed how the Kalanguya people of Bacneng earn a living but has also deeply impacted their cultural identity.

Impact on Core Social Structures and Values

The transition to a cash economy has profoundly affected the Kalanguya's social structures. The commercial focus on efficiency and individual profit puts considerable strain on foundational collaborative values like *Ubbo* (cooperation and mutual support for activities such as house building and farming) and *Hulpon* (sharing and mutual help akin to *bayanihan*, which helps ease financial burdens and strengthens community bonds). As noted by Dressler (2009), when commercial activity becomes the priority, traditional labor systems like *ubbo* risk disappearing, displacing the social safety nets that protected the Kalanguya for generations. Furthermore, as more outsiders and modern ways enter the community, certain old social practices, such as the custom of leaving houses and granaries unlocked, are starting to decline.

Cultural Documentation and Identity Preservation

The findings suggest that the Kalanguya value system is primarily changing or being modified rather than disappearing completely (Brodowicz, 2024). The most hopeful legacy of this economic change is the community's strong, active effort to protect their culture. The Kalanguya are not passively accepting change; they are actively working hard to save and document their culture and traditional knowledge. This conscious action demonstrates a remarkable strength and resilience in trying to find a way to earn money and foster development while simultaneously keeping their unique identity and sustainable traditions alive. This effort represents a negotiation of modernization, ensuring that cultural transformation serves as a modification of traditional values rather than their complete loss (Brodowicz, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Kalanguya people of Bacneng are undergoing a profound socioeconomic transformation, moving from a stable, traditional subsistence and barter economy characterized by *Inum-an* and *Hinna-lat* toward a market-driven, commercial system. The transition is driven primarily by the need for cash income, the necessity of overcoming poverty, and the physical integration provided by road networks and trade centers like Nueva Vizcaya Agricultural Trading (NVAT) Post.

While this shift has created positive economic opportunities, offering higher profits and new professional roles, it has also introduced significant challenges, including environmental risks from chemical use and severe economic and social marginalization due to limited market access. Crucially, the focus on individual profit is straining communal support structures like *Ubbo* and *Hulpon*. Despite these pressures, the Kalanguya are demonstrating cultural resilience through the continued practice of *Inum-an*, coupled with a concerted effort to document and preserve their traditional knowledge.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and the identified structural gaps of this research, the following recommendations are suggested for stakeholders, local government units (LGUs), and non-government organizations (NGOs):

Enhance Fair Market Access through Cooperatives

Interventions must focus on eliminating dependence on third-party buyers and middlemen by establishing farmer-owned cooperatives or direct-to-consumer networks. This structural change will ensure that Kalanguya producers retain a larger share of the profits, grant them direct control over pricing, and actively mitigate economic marginalization.

Formally Integrate Communal Systems into Policy

Institutional policy interventions should formally recognize, support, and protect traditional labor systems like Ubbo and Hulpon. This should be accomplished by integrating these indigenous reciprocal frameworks directly into modern development projects, reinforcing community cohesion while accommodating the necessary transition to a cash income economy.

Provide Institutional Funding for Cultural Preservation

Local government units and cultural institutions must provide sustained funding and structured institutional support for ongoing community-led efforts to document and preserve Kalanguya traditional knowledge. This ensures that their unique indigenous identity and heritage are actively maintained alongside modernization and economic growth.

Incorporate Quantitative Methodologies in Future Research

To address the empirical limitations of this study, future research projects must complement the documented oral histories of environmental decline with quantitative scientific methodologies. Specifically, future studies should incorporate quantitative soil analysis such as testing for nutrient depletion, chemical saturation, and soil degradation to provide measurable data that firmly supports the community's oral testimonies.

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25. Mr. Patricio. Interview by researcher, PNRC, Bacneng, Santa Fe, December 15, 2025.
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