

# PANAGDAPIL: A REFLECTION OF BAYANIHAN SPIRIT AMONG ILOCANOS IN NORTHERN PHILIPPINES

## ABSTRACT

The study examines *panagdapil* as a historical Ilocano custom rooted in the bayanihan spirit, wherein individuals assist one another in agricultural endeavors. *Panagdapil* functions as a cultural tradition and economic venture in the rural regions of the Ilocos Norte, notwithstanding contemporary industrial and socioeconomic transformations. The research design employs ethnography with interviews among local farmer and elders as qualitative methods to investigate the economic and social relevance of *panagdapil*, focusing on its function in relationship-building and the obstacles of adaptation in modern society. *Panagdapil* offers rural communities advantages by enhancing sugarcane production while simultaneously fortifying social bonds through collaborative work practices. The future stability of *panagdapil* is threatened by three primary factors: urban migration, mechanization, and a declining participation rate among the youth population. The research illustrates the necessity of cultural preservation activities endorsed by government and community-led programs to save *panagdapil* as both cultural heritage and a sustainable economic enterprise. The resurgence of *panagdapil* among the Ilocano community would facilitate the preservation of their indigenous heritage while fostering sustainable rural economies.

**Keywords:** *panagdapil, bayanihan, Ilocano culture, communal labor, cultural preservation, rural livelihoods*

---

## INTRODUCTION

Aguilar (2013) asserts that the bayanihan tradition is evident in the Ilocos Region, as this locale exemplifies Filipino cultural heritage and strong communal values. *Panagdapil* epitomizes the essential Ilocano ethos wherein community members provide reciprocal assistance throughout designated agricultural responsibilities, particularly during planting and harvesting seasons (Dacumos, 2018). The Ilocano cultural practice unites its participants, exemplifying exceptional community cooperation that reflects the profound survival ethos of the original Ilocano populace (Pungayan, 2005).

*Panagdapil* retains its essential function in rural Ilocano society despite the rise of modernization, since this communal labor tradition exemplifies persistent collaborative effort (Tolentino, 2020). The increasing urbanization and migration of the youth population, along with technical developments in agriculture, have posed challenges to the preservation of this traditional heritage (Bumatay & Castro, 2019).

The study explores *panagdapil* as a traditional expression of the bayanihan spirit by analyzing its sociocultural functions, economic implications, and contemporary adaptations among Ilocano communities. The paper employs ethnographic methods with interviews with farmers and elders to collect firsthand accounts on *panagdapil*, demonstrating its dual function in safeguarding indigenous knowledge and fortifying cohesive communities (Fernandez, 2017).

This study also investigates the significance of bayanihan in contemporary agriculture, as it generates fresh insights into cultural sustainability, rural development, and social stability (Santos, 2021). The study ultimately advocates the acknowledgment and rehabilitation of *panagdapil* as a cultural legacy and a sustainable paradigm for community livelihood enhancement.

This further seeks to investigate *panagdapil* as an expression of the bayanihan spirit among Ilocanos in the Ilocos Region, analysing its cultural importance, socio-economic effects, and endurance in modern society, hence the following questions:

1. What is the socio-economic relevance of the *panagdapil*?
2. In what ways does *panagdapil* foster bayanihan among Ilocanos?
3. What are the challenges in the preservation of the culture of *panagdapil*?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper examines *panagdapil* as a manifestation of the bayanihan spirit among Ilocanos in the Ilocos Region through a qualitative research methodology. The research examines the cultural, social, and economic aspects of this traditional pastime through ethnographic and phenomenological methodologies. The process incorporates descriptive and interpretative techniques through participant observation, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). Purposive sampling identifies participants such as farmers, elders, and younger community members who are directly engaged in *panagdapil*. The participants were from several cities and municipalities in Ilocos Norte, particularly from the Municipality of Paoay (Brgy. Baliga), the City of Batac (Brgy. Baay), and Laoag City (Brgy. 56-B Bacsil South). Data collection entails direct fieldwork participation, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was translated into Ilokano for the interviews to enhance communication. The data collection process entailed transcribing and translating recorded interviews and written responses from Ilokano to English for greater dissemination. The participant observation approach was employed, enabling the researcher to directly observe the *panagdapil* within the community.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this section, the data gathered is presented and provided meaning across three themes: (1) the socioeconomic relevance of *panagdapil*, (2) ways that *panagdapil* fosters the bayanihan spirit among Ilocanos, and (3) the challenges faced in preserving the *panagdapil* culture. The initial theme explains the significance of *panagdapil* in fulfilling the socio-economic requirements of families within a specific

community. The second theme examines how *panagdapil* fosters the bayanihan spirit among Ilocanos in the Ilocos Region. The third theme addresses the issues associated with the preservation of panagdapil culture.

**Socio-economic Relevance of Panagdapil.** *Panagdapil* is integral to the everyday lives of the Ilocanos due to the benefits that it offers. A major benefit is the native goods produced by the panagdapil, notably *bennal* (sucrose). The *bennal* is prepared in a big vessel called *sinublan*, used to produce several types of *tagapulot* (molasses), *basi* (wine), or *suka* (vinegar). The refined molasses is transformed into sugar, the principal commercial product obtained from sugarcane. All these sugarcane products provide cash for the farmers and their families. These products can be promoted to both local residents and tourists visiting Ilocos Norte. A supplementary income derived from *panagdapil* is the practice termed *pinagpaltaw*, which entails the production of diverse cuisines utilizing the *tagapulot*. Participants prepare *tambo-tambo* (rolled sticky rice), *sinambong* (sticky rice wrapped in coconut leaves), and *inkalti* (strips of papaya). After the goods are prepared, participants in *panagdapil* place them in the boiling molasses for cooking.

One respondent shared this experience by saying:

Ti *panagdapil* ket naimbag lang met a pamataudan iti sangkabassit nga pagbiyag, ata dagiti *suka*, *basi*, ken *tagapulot* ket mailako met iti kailian wennu iti turista nga bumisbita idtuy ayantayu. Adamet dagitay umay *agpadapil*, wennu umay gumatang ti *bennal* pagaramid da iti suman. Adu metten iti naitulong ti *panagdapil* para ken dagtuy agtutubo nga makaturpos iti panagbasa iti pagilian tayo ata dagiti nagannak da ket *panagdapil* iti pagsapulan da. (*Panagdapil* is truly a good source of modest livelihood, and the vinegar, sugarcane wine, and sugar can also be sold to locals or tourists who visit our place. Moreover, those who come to join the *panagdapil*, or those who buy the sugarcane to make suman (sticky rice cakes), contribute greatly. *Panagdapil* has also helped many youth complete their education, as their parents rely on *panagdapil* for their needs.)

**Ways that Panagdapil fosters the Bayanihan Spirit among Ilocanos.** *Panagdapil* fosters the bayanihan spirit by promoting social cooperation, collective effort, and cultural preservation. The task necessitates the participation of multiple individuals to oversee the *dadapilan*, with neighbors and family members cooperating to extract sugarcane juice, illustrating the Ilocano tradition of communal support. This practice fortifies the *hunusan* system, in which labor is voluntarily exchanged without immediate compensation, fostering a culture of reciprocity. The gathering of community members at *panagdapil* fortifies social bonds through narrative sharing, knowledge dissemination, and cooperative initiatives. Senior members impart customary practices to subsequent generations, so conserving history through a communal educational process. *Panagdapil* embodies bayanihan by upholding cultural traditions and promoting social cohesion via communal responsibility and the preservation of Ilocano heritage.

Respondents stated that:

Iti panagdapil ket adu nga ubra isu nga kasapulan iti adu nga tao tapnun malpas detuy nga aktibidad. Nu pinagdapil, adut iti umay tumulong manipud iti *pinagbalo* (planting of sugarcane) aginganat agluto kami iti *tagapulot*. Nu agdapil kami, umuna nga ubraen ket *agwakwak* (removal of roots and leaves of sugarcane) santu duwa nga tao iti kasapulan nga agyan idjay ayanti dadapilan

ata adda para-isubo ti *unas* (sugarcane) santu idjay bangir na, addantu met para awat ken dagtay *usang* (extracted sugarcane). Addantumet agbagkat kentay nataya nga *bennal* sanantu mapan ipan idjay ayanti *anawang* nga nakaisaangan ti *sinublan*. Nu pinagluto iti *tagapulot*, masapol met nga *ilab-labam* nga umuna dayjay *bennal* tapnun maikkat dagitay rugit nga naisurot, adda met tagakiwar nukwa usaren na daytuy makunkuna nga *batil* nga naaramid manipud iti kawayan. Inton maluto tay tagapuloten, isuntu tay mabalinen nga rugyan iti *pinagsilamot* (tasting of molasses) usaren iti *idos* (flat stick made from bamboo). Nu iti *pinagpaltaw* met, kasapulan latta met iti adu nga tao. Kaspagarigan kuma, adda mesa nga mangukis ken mang-slice iti kayo ti lalaki a papaya sadantu ibilag ken ubunen tapnu maaramid tu nga kas *inkalti*. Nu jay met *tambo-tambo*, kasapulan met iti duwa wennu tallo nga tao tapnun ibulalo da iti babassit tay diket, ken nu tay *sinambong* met, umanay met ta duwa nga taon nga agipan diket idjay naaramid nga bulong ti niyog. Ken dagtuy nga kaado nga proseso ti panagdapil, kasapulan talaga met iti adu nga tao. Ngem ti kapintasan na detuy nga aktibidad, nu madamag dan nga adda *agdapil*, sigud metten nga adut ti umarayat ken tumulong nga kabagyan, karruba wennu asinno man nga mangayat umay makikadwa. Isu nga kasapulan nga say-sayaatem met iti padam nga tao tapnun nu sikat agkasapulan, alisto dantu met nga umay tumulong kenka.

(Many individuals are needed to complete the *panagdapil* procedure because it requires a lot of work and effort. Many people come and assist during *panagdapil*, helping with everything from sugarcane planting to molasses making. When doing *panagdapil*, the first step is to remove the sugarcane's roots and leaves. Two people must remain at the *dadapilan* or wooden mill to move the sugarcane there, while the other person would take the extracted sugarcane from the other side. Someone will carry the extracted sugarcane juice and pour it into a large vat, or what we call a *sinublan*, before cooking it in a round *anawang*, which is dug soil. There will be a person to stir and he will use a bamboo called *batil*. The bubbles should be removed when cooking the sucrose called *bennal* to make it into a *tagapulot* or molasses because there may be dirt that included. Now that the molasses has boiled, it's time to taste it with an *idos*, which is a bamboo stick that has been flattened and used as a spoon. *Pinagpaltaw*, or the preparation of several delicacies, involves a lot of labour and, of course, a lot of people. To produce *inkalti*, for instance, the task will be to cut off the stem of a male papaya, slice it into thin, round pieces, place it in the sun to dry, and then tie it on a string. Two or three people are needed to roll the flour into a small circle for the *tambo-tambo*, while two people are sufficient for putting the sticky rice into the coconut leaves for the *sinambong*. It takes a lot of individuals to complete the *panagdapil* in this type of process. The great thing about this practice is that neighbours and family members will automatically provide a hand when they learn that a family will be doing the *panagdapil*. Therefore, you should treat your neighbour with kindness so that they would be quick to help you in times of need.)

Studies proves that *panagdapil*, a cooperative work practice among Ilocanos, exemplifies the persistent Bayanihan tradition, promoting unity (*pagkakaisa*) and mutual assistance (*tulong-tulong*) in agricultural and crisis situations (Taccad, 2019; Agcaoili, 2015). Research on post-disaster recovery in Ilocos Norte underscores how the Bayanihan spirit facilitates resilient community reconstruction, with coordinated volunteer initiatives and collective work reflecting historical *panagdapil* customs (Alvarez, 2017; Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte, 2020). Cultural analyses highlight that Ilocano proverbs and social norms reinforce Bayanihan as a fundamental aspect of communal identity, facilitating its retention across generations

(Agcaoili, 2015; Lumbera & Lumbera, 2005).

Consequently, *panagdapil* functions as a practical method for collaborative labor and a symbolic embodiment of the Ilocano Bayanihan spirit, illustrating its ongoing significance in modern society.

**The challenges faced in preserving the Panagdapil culture.** This practice is not well acknowledged, especially among the younger generation. The principal obstacles to the preservation of *Panagdapil* legacy in modern Ilocano society are modernization and shifting socioeconomic factors. The increasing preference of younger generations towards non-agricultural jobs in metropolitan areas has resulted in urban migration and a reduction in agricultural livelihoods, hence decreasing prospects for participation in *Panagdapil*. The traditional importance of joint efforts has diminished due to the rise of individualism and the commercialization of labor; many Ilocanos now favor wage-based employment over reciprocal labor systems. The government's and cultural institutions' focus on visible historical artifacts rather than traditional labor techniques, such as *Panagdapil*, has intensified deterioration owing to institutional neglect.

Respondents stated that:

Awan unay makaamo ken etuy nga aktibidad aglalo ken dagtuy kabataan itan ata detuy *panagdapil* ket nagkakauna nga ubra ta isut namulagatan mi idi nga ub-ubraen pelang dagiti lola kada lola mi idi. Isunga sapay kuma ta mangipaay ti gobyerno iti programa nga maisayangkat para maikkan met adal dagiti dadduma nga tattao panggep iti *panagdapil* ken nu kasano met kaimportante detuy nga aktibidad. Mesa pay nga karit iti *panagdapil* ita nga agdama ket bassit langen dagiti agmul-mula ti unasen ata awanmet unay maimula nga unasen. Isu nga sapay kuma met ta mangted met ti gobyerno iti maimula nga *unas* tapnun adu latta met ti agmula ken agdapil nu kastuy. Maysa pay a karit ti *panagdapil* ket ti mapukpukawen nga traditional a *dadapilan* ngem adda met moderno nga *dadapilan* isu daytuy metal nga *dadapilan* ngem ingget ngina namet nu gatangem isu nga uray kayat pay ti tao iti *agdapil*, nu awan met maigatang da kendetuy moderno nga *dadapilan*, handa latta met nga makadapil. Mesa pay kuma met nga solusyonan ti gobyerno daytuy ta uray mangted dalang met ti mesa nga moderno nga *dadapilan* tunggal barangay tapnun adda usaren dagituy kayat nat *agdapil* nga kakailian.

(The work is largely unfamiliar to the youth nowadays, as it is a traditional work that our ancestors once practiced. Consequently, I hope that the government would implement a program to educate the public about *panagdapil* and its significance. A current difficulty in *panagdapil* is the scarcity of men who plants sugarcane due to the limited availability of sugarcane for cultivation. Consequently, I hope that the government will supply the sugarcane to encourage widespread planting and harvesting under these circumstances. Another obstacle of *panagdapil* is the vanishing traditional *dadapilan*; yet, there exists a contemporary variant, the metal *dadapilan*, which is prohibitively expensive. Consequently, even if individuals desire to engage in *panagdapil*, their inability to afford the modern *dadapilan* persists. The government need to resolve this matter by providing a modern *dadapilan* to each barangay, facilitating participation in the *panagdapil* for all interested individuals.)

Without intentional efforts like education, governmental support, and community revitalization programs, the *Panagdapil* tradition is at risk of vanishing, representing a significant loss to Ilocano cultural heritage. Thorough preservation methods must address these issues to ensure the conservation of this vital manifestation of the Ilocano Bayanihan ethos.

Ilocano traditional practices are essential for preserving cultural identity, fostering sustainable development, enhancing social cohesiveness, and protecting intangible heritage. These activities, especially the panagdapil, function as vital links to Ilocano past and offer present advantages to communities. Proactive conservation by documentation, education, and policy advocacy is vital.

## CONCLUSIONS

The *panagdapil* custom is a crucial cultural and social practice that reflects the persistent Bayanihan spirit of the Ilocano community. This practice serves as both an economic strategy and a communal endeavor, sustaining rural economies via the manufacturing of traditional sugarcane products while reinforcing social connections through collaborative labor and the transfer of intergenerational expertise. This age-old tradition has considerable challenges due to urbanization, changing economic priorities, and generational disinterest. The decline of conventional *dadapilan* mills, coupled with insufficient institutional backing, further endangers its sustainability.

Preserving *panagdapil* necessitates immediate, coordinated actions that tackle both practical and cultural aspects. Government activities ought to prioritize infrastructure enhancement, agricultural incentives, and cultural education projects. Local communities must actively involve younger generations in the tradition, highlighting its significance beyond economic advantages - as a living heritage that preserves Ilocano identity. The merging of academic documentation and heritage tourism could enhance preservation initiatives.

The potential loss of *panagdapil* signifies more than the vanishing of a traditional practice; it would entail the decline of a communal ethic that has upheld Ilocano communities for generations. The preservation of heritage is not solely focused on protecting history, but also on sustaining a culturally-rooted foundation for contemporary sustainable living and social unity. By instituting extensive protective measures today, we can guarantee that this manifestation of Bayanihan persists as both a cultural heritage and pragmatic wisdom for future generations of Ilocanos.

Ultimately, the survival of *panagdapil* depends on acknowledging its dual function as an economic lifeline and a cultural touchstone—a practice deserving preservation not only for its historical importance but also for its ongoing relevance in modern Ilocano culture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Panagdapil*, the indigenous Ilocano technique for sugarcane processing, is threatened with extinction due to the expansion of modern trends. Several measures must be executed to preserve the significance of panagdapil, including governmental support via educational initiatives, community involvement, and economically driven development supported by research documentation. The cultural and economic significance of *Panagdapil* requires governmental acknowledgment to get funding for agricultural support and improved processing equipment. Education is vital since schools facilitate cultural festivals and conduct instructive seminars to impart traditional knowledge. Community support, along with youth engagement, is essential as local organizations and cooperatives uphold cultural awareness initiatives and provide mentorship services. Heritage tourism and promotional initiatives can enhance the cultural and economic value of *Panagdapil*, as local markets supported by cooperatives enable the sale of products derived from sugarcane. Precise recording of *panagdapil*, along with its value, necessitates extensive research and appropriate documentation techniques.

**References:**

- Aguilar, F. V. (2013). *Migration revolution: Philippine nationhood and class relations in a globalized age*. University of the Philippines Press.
- Bumatay, L., & Castro, J. (2019). Modernization vs. tradition in Ilocos agriculture. *Asian Journal of Agriculture*, 12(3), 45–60.
- Dacumos, R. (2018). Indigenous labor systems in Ilocos agriculture. *Journal of Northern Luzon Studies*, 7(2), 112–130.
- Fernandez, L. (2017). Oral histories of Ilocano farmers: Ethnography of panagdapil. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 65(1), 78–95.
- Pungayan, E. L. (2005). *The Ilocano ethos: Survival and community in traditional practices*. National Historical Institute.
- Santos, R. (2021). Cultural sustainability in rural Philippines: Bayanihan and agricultural resilience. *ASEAN Journal of Community Engagement*, 5(1), 1–15.
- Tolentino, D. (2020). The resilience of indigenous farming practices: Panagdapil in contemporary Ilocos. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9(4), 33–48.
- Arenio, A. (2018). "Community Cooperation in Philippine Traditional Farming: The Case of Dagdagas and Panagdapil." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*.
- Cordero-Fernando, G. (1994). "The Soul Book: Philippine Folk Beliefs and Rituals." GCF Books.
- Dacanay, J. (2005). "The Ilocano Ethos: A Study of Cultural Values and Practices." University of the Philippines Press.
- Perez, R., et al. (2010). "Indigenous Agricultural Practices in Northern Luzon: Sustainability and Challenges." *Philippine Studies Journal*.
- Tacio, H. (2017). "Bayanihan in the Fields: The Persistence of Communal Farming in Rural Philippines." *Journal of Southeast Asian Culture*.



- Garcia, M. (2015). "The Role of Traditional Labor Exchange in Ilocano Farming Communities." (Undergraduate Thesis). University of the Philippines - Diliman.
- Alvarez, M. K. (2017). Community resilience and the Bayanihan spirit in Ilocos Norte post-Typhoon Lawin. *Journal of Philippine Local Studies*, 12(3), 45–60.
- Taccad, R. (2019). Dap-ayan and the culture of mutual aid among Ilocano farmers. *Philippine Sociological Review*, 67(2), 89–104.
- Provincial Government of Ilocos Norte. (2020). Bayanihan para sa probinsya: COVID-19 response initiatives. <http://www.ilocosnorte.gov.ph>
- Agcaoili, F. (2015). *The Ilocano ethos: Pagkakaisa and Bayanihan in tradition*. University of the Philippines Press.
- Philippine Daily Inquirer. (2021, October 15). Ilocanos revive Bayanihan spirit to rebuild after typhoon. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net>