

## Democracy and Citizenship in Indigenous Socio-Political Institutions in the Cordillera: Focus on Sagada, Mountain Province<sup>1</sup>

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While village members in Sagada, Mountain Province do not perceive local institutions and practices in terms of western concepts of democracy and citizenship, comparable indigenous values underlie their socio-political institutions. The *dap-ay* (ward) and the *amam-a* (council of elders), for example, encompass the democratic values of consultation, participation in decision-making, consensus-building, representative government and commitment to the common good, while *simpangbon* embodies the concept of citizenship. Moreover, oral tradition and customary law provide the rules for exemplary and acceptable behavior. They guide the operation of the *dap-ay* and decision-making by the *amam-a*. These rules and institutions also co-exist with local government structures which, in turn, have been indigenized to operate within the context of customary law. In sum, Sagada may not have a formal democratic and representative government, nor a formal conception of citizenship, but the village democracy embodied in the *dap-ay* and the *amam-a*, along with the indigenous concept of citizenship as relected in the *simpangbon*, have endured for centuries. Less bureaucratic and structured than formal democracy, these institutions have effectively sustained life in the village and helped enhance peace and social justice.

### Introduction

This paper looks into indigenous perceptions and values of democracy and citizenship in the Cordillera. Specifically, it attempts to answer the following questions: Are there indigenous views concerning democracy and citizenship in the Cordillera? If so, how are these views practiced in the community? What indigenous social institutions exist in the community to safeguard democracy and ensure good citizenship? What are the indigenous social sanctions used in case of violation of customary laws? How do these indigenous values and practices interact with the more formal political systems introduced by the state? Are these indigenous values and practices changing? In what ways? How does the community cope with these changes?

In the early stages of developing this paper, however, it was decided that it would be difficult, if not inappropriate, to ask the key informants and respondents from the local communities about their indigenous perceptions and values of democracy and citizenship, these two being



essentially western concepts. Thus, it was deemed more appropriate to approach the entire problem from the perspective of the indigenous communities themselves. It was decided to ask the key informants about their indigenous political values and institutions, and then see how these reflect the values of democracy and good citizenship.

This paper then will focus on the indigenous, customary and traditional socio-political values, practices and institutions in the Cordillera, specifically in Sagada, Mountain Province, especially as these relate to democracy and citizenship. It will also explore how these customs and institutions interact with the more formal and nationally defined system of local governance. The paper begins by providing an overview of the various socio-political institutions in the Cordillera as derived from existing literature, before proceeding to dwell on its focus which is Sagada poblacion.

### **The Cordillera**

The Cordillera refers to the rugged mountain range in the central section of Northern Luzon. It is bounded on the west by the Ilocos Coast and on the east by the Cagayan Valley, and consists of the provinces of Benguet, Mountain Province, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao and Abra.

The Cordillera is home to varied ethno-linguistic groups, of which seven (7) have traditionally been identified as major ethno-linguistic groups. These are the Ibaloi of southern Benguet, the Kankanaey of northern Benguet and western Mountain Province, the Bontoc, the Kalinga, the Ifugao, the Isneg of Apayao, and the Tinggian of upland Abra.

The three centuries of Spanish colonization in the Philippines was never really effectively extended over the Cordillera. Thus, while the majority of the Filipinos in the pacified lowland regions underwent Christianization and Hispanization under colonialism, the indigenous groups in the Cordillera sustained their traditional structures, beliefs and institutions. Presently, therefore, the Cordillera people bear the distinction of having sustained much of their indigenous culture.

Of particular interest to this paper are the indigenous socio-political institutions and practices of the Cordillera. For centuries, these structures and mechanisms have been used to manage and sustain the local

villages or *ili*, the people and their natural resources. These indigenous institutions have also served to maintain the solidarity within the *ili* and, in the case of Kalinga and Bontoc villagers, the political and economic relationship of the *ili* with neighboring villages.

### An Overview of Indigenous Socio-Political Institutions in the Cordillera<sup>2</sup>

Each major ethno-linguistic group in the Cordillera has its own distinct indigenous socio-political system. Essentially, however, all these indigenous groups have socio-political structures that are either kinship- or ward-based. These structures are responsible for making decisions and resolving conflicts within the village and/or between neighboring villages.

Citizenship, used here to mean membership in the local socio-political unit (be it the ward, the *ili*, or the tribe), is an important aspect of life in the indigenous communities. Membership hereto assures one of the protection of the group but it also requires one's acceptance of the decisions made by the local leaders on behalf of the group.

Leading these socio-political structures are councils which are commonly made up of old men who have distinguished themselves, over the years, for their wisdom, impartiality, articulateness and, in some groups, wealth and bravery. The latter is especially seen in the case of the *pangat* of Kalinga.

In addition to the council of elders, some Cordillera groups also rely on the services of go-betweens or intermediaries in the resolution of conflict among the members of the village or between villages.

Thus, among the Ibaloi, the elders, called *impanama*, constitute the *tongtong* or council that is tasked to make decisions. Among the Kankanaeys, the decision-makers are the elders known as the *amam-a*. The Kankanaey elders come from the wards or *dap-ay*, the smallest socio-political unit in a village or *ili*. Similarly, among the Bontocs, the *amam-a* are the decision-makers who come from the wards, locally called *ator* of the village. In times of conflict with another village, an intermediary or *pinakarsu*, who is recognized by both warring villages by birth and marriage, is hired to act as mediator in the resolution of the



conflict. In Tinggian communities, the old men or *lallakay* compose the council that makes decisions on behalf of the whole community.

Among the Kalingas, the *papangat* are the key figures in decision-making. A man can earn the status of *pangat* by virtue of his wealth, lineage, bravery, articulateness, etc. The same *papangat* are also the peace pact holders and are thus also the key figures in the settlement of war between villages of Kalinga. Similar to the Bontocs' *pechen*, the Kalingas have a socio-political institution called the *bodong* or peace pact, which facilitates the settlement of feuds and the establishment of peaceful co-existence between villages. Such peace pacts guarantee mutual respect for one another's territory and its resources, and regulates economic or trade relations between villages.

Among the Isnegs of Apayao, the customary political leaders of the village are the *mengel*, who act as mediators in the resolution of internal conflict.

Given the diversity in the indigenous socio-political institutions in the Cordillera, however, some significant commonalities surface. One is the important role of the elders. Another is the basically democratic character of decision-making on the village level.

It must be noted that the elders are not autocratic rulers. They earn their status by virtue of the knowledge, wisdom, sense of fairness and wealth of experience that they have shown throughout their lives. Furthermore, their decisions are acceptable to the villagers precisely because of the respect and recognition that is accorded the elders. In addition, their decisions are backed by the body of customary law and oral tradition that has sustained village solidarity through the centuries.

We must also point out too, that, while the elders are tasked to make decisions on behalf of the *ili*, decision-making is basically democratic in character. Before the elders arrive at their final decisions, they first go through a process of consultation with the members of the community. They also refer back to the *ili's* body of customary law for guidance. Finally, decisions are generally reached through consensus building, until the elders arrive at a unified position on the issues, conflicts and disputes submitted to them for resolution.



At this juncture, we ask, to what extent have these traditional and customary socio-political institutions and practices of the indigenous communities of the Cordillera uplands been influenced by Christian and lowland Filipino values and systems. This question is a continuing subject of inquiry among scholars.

U.P. College Baguio has conducted a significant number of researches, mostly through its Cordillera Studies Center, on this and related questions. Most of the recent studies reviewed for the purpose of putting together this paper conclude that there indeed have been changes, in varying degrees, in the socio-political structures in the various Cordillera communities brought about by the imposition of national state systems and institutions on the local structures. The degree of change in the local socio-political structures varies from one community to another, depending partially on the proximity of the communities to urban areas and centers of government. All the studies point out, though, that elements of the traditional systems and practices are still evident in the prevailing socio-political systems obtaining in the various localities.

Boquiren (1995) observed, for instance, that while the indigenous institution of decision-making in a northern Kankanaey community has weakened over the past decades, village elders are still regularly consulted by barangay officials, including the *Lupong Tagapamayapa* or *Lupon*, for short, where the elders may even be asked to sit as members.<sup>3</sup>

In the study of Colongon, Jr. and Corpuz-Diaz (1996:8) in two villages in Ifugao, they noted that when village elders were themselves members of the *Lupon*, "some traditional rules are still applied," although "it is not apparent if the people are conscious of indigenizing the barangay structure, i.e., that they wanted to utilize new rules or processes but without totally abandoning traditional methods of decision-making and dispute settlement."

While there have been reports of interface or blending of traditional and state-imposed political systems, other studies have also noted the inevitability of conflict arising from the non-recognition by the state of customary institutions and practices. This view was particularly stressed in the work of Prill-Brett (1993) which discussed the indigenous property regimes among the Bontocs of Mountain Province, and how the state-



introduced property regime "overlaps and competes with the local property regime's management."

The same view is echoed in the work of Rood and Casambre (1994: 18-21) where they explored "*disjunction in the articulation of government policy and indigenous culture*" on resource ownership and management. They concluded that, "*Government must recognize the indigenous communities in the uplands by reinforcing indigenous mechanisms rather than supplanting them.*"

All the foregoing, along with other related studies, point to a dynamic process of interaction between local and national institutions. Such interaction may take the form of blending and interface, or conflict and outright superimposition.

With the foregoing general overview, we now look into the case of Sagada, its local socio-political institutions and their interaction with formal state institutions.

### **Focus on Sagada**

This case study focuses on the municipality of Sagada, Mountain Province. The specific area investigated was Sagada Poblacion, which consists of three contiguous barangays, namely, Patay, Dagdag and Demang. The following description of the study site is intended to provide the social and historical context for the discussion of the changing indigenous socio-political institutions of Sagada.

#### ***Geographical and Demographic Description***

Sagada is one of the ten municipalities of Mountain Province, and is bounded on the north by Abra, on the east by Bontoc (the capital town of Mountain Province), on the south by the municipalities of Bauko and Sabangan, and on the west by Besao municipality. It has a land area of 9,969 hectares and is made up of nineteen barangays.

Sagada poblacion is approximately 150 kilometers north of Baguio City. It can be reached through a seven-hour bus trip along the Halsema Highway (more commonly known as the Mountain Trail). At an average elevation of 5,000 feet above sea level, and with an abundant pine cover,

the climate in Sagada is temperate. Like the rest of western Mountain Province, Sagada's rainy season falls during the period of May to October, while the dry season is from November to April. The topography of Sagada poblacion ranges from sloping to hilly. Housing settlements are clustered, especially in the town center.

According to the 1990 Census of Population and Housing of the National Statistics Office, the municipality of Sagada had a total population of 10,353 and 2,318 households, accounting for an average household size of 4.5. Of the total population in the municipality, 2,559 persons or 24.8 percent resided in the poblacion. Close to half of the population in Sagada poblacion, or 1,208, lived in Patay. Demang, on the other hand, had 712 residents, while Dagdag had the least number of people at 639.<sup>4</sup>

Key informants estimated that approximately 90 percent of the residents of Sagada poblacion are native to the area, i.e., Kankana-ey by ethnic origin. They are also referred to as "*Aplai*," which literally means "people from upstream." The remaining 10 percent of the population are of mixed ethnicity, due to intermarriages and migration.

### **Socio-Economic Activities**

Up to the present time, agriculture continues to make up the economic base of Sagada poblacion, with rice as the major crop. The poblacion's rice farms or *payew* are exclusively planted to traditional varieties of rice. Farm and seedling preparations are usually done around November, and harvesting, in June or July. As recent as the 1980s, backyard gardens have been opened and planted to temperate vegetables, presumably in response to the growing demand from visitors. Swidden farms or *uma* also abound in the poblacion. *Camote* is usually grown in the *uma*.

However, since the second half of the 1970s, tourism has grown into a significant industry in Sagada, which boasts of extensive cave networks, rock formations, waterfalls, natural pools, rice terraces, hanging coffins and other tourist attractions. Tourism grew rapidly in the mid-1980s, and resulted in the mushrooming of inns and lodging houses in Sagada poblacion, as well as the rise in the number of small restaurants and cafes that cater to the tastes of foreign visitors, mostly European.



With the rise of tourism also came the provision of uninterrupted electric service. While the electric lines had long been in place, it was only in the 1980s that power supply became regular. Tap water is available either through household water lines, or communal faucets. These water systems tapping the springs in the locality were set up by individual households, the local government or the Church. Water supply, however, is a problem especially during the dry season.

Sagada is thus no longer the quiet municipal center that it used to be prior to the 1970s. For the past 20 years, it has grown into a bustling tourist destination, with the accompanying growth in commerce and trade. Inns and lodging houses, including other tourist facilities such as pubs, restaurants and souvenir shops now abound and continue to increase in number. A corresponding increase in the demand for food, beverages and other consumer goods was also evident during the past twenty years. In other words, the cash economy is fast becoming a dominant economic system in Sagada.

### ***Outside Influences***

The Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP), otherwise known as the Anglican Church, has maintained a strong presence and influence over the population of the poblacion. Originally, the Anglican mission was established in Patay at the turn of the century under the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Until today, in fact, the town center, especially within the immediate vicinity of the mission compound, possesses the ambiance of a sleepy, old English town.

As a result of the influence of the Anglican mission on Sagada, it is not uncommon to find locals, including young children, to be quite conversant in the English language. To date, the mission, which is presently under the jurisdiction and management of the ECP, still maintains a high school, a hospital, and a cathedral. The Church also maintains a lodging house which was formerly an orphanage run by Episcopalian sisters until its conversion due to the steady influx of domestic and foreign tourists starting towards the end of the 1970s. Other than the church-affiliated high school, there is also a public elementary school in the poblacion.



While Sagada has experienced the growth of the tourist industry, this has not been without some negative repercussions. Foremost among these is the introduction of foreign values that undermine custom and tradition.

The influx of domestic and foreign visitors definitely ushered in new ideas, lifestyles and values into Sagada. Many foreign visitors have been observed to be ignorant of and insensitive to the local culture. Stories abound of desecration of sacred places including burial grounds, accounts of nude bathing in natural pools and waterfalls, not to mention the trafficking of illegal drugs.

Sagada has also distinguished itself in having a number of local sons and daughters who have earned professional degrees. However, with the limited internal opportunities for professional and economic advancement, Sagada has always been an outmigration area. These outmigrants though have maintained their links with their families in Sagada. They do visit regularly, and thus contribute to the introduction of foreign values from their second homes in the urban areas, the lowlands or overseas. All these indicate a heavy influx of foreign values into Sagada at the present time.

On top of these, there is the national government that has been supplanting local systems of governance with its own, not necessarily to the benefit of the local communities. For instance, Sagada is, to date, still classified as forest land, and thus inalienable, by virtue of its inclusion in the coverage of the Central Cordillera Forest Reserve declared in 1925. Without doubt, the imposition of the formal structures of governance has its effects on the indigenous socio-political systems and practices in Sagada.

In view of the foregoing, one could easily conclude that the indigenous socio-political institutions and practices of Sagada have all been relegated to the background. Data gathered from field observations and key informants, however, prove otherwise. The reality is that the indigenous socio-political institutions are still very much in place and are fully operational.



### Indigenous Socio-Political Institutions of Sagada Poblacion

The three contiguous barangays of Demang, Dagdag and Patay were chosen for this study not so much because together they constitute the municipal poblacion, but more because these three communities still perform closely coordinated customary practices.

Indigenous institutions and customary law govern the life of the community and regulate human activities which revolve around the land and man's natural environment. It is through these customary practices and institutions that one's citizenship finds meaning and expression, that one's rights and obligations as a member of a political unit are safeguarded. More importantly, it is also through these customary practices and institutions that village democracy and solidarity is ensured and sustained.

#### *The Dap-ay*

The smallest socio-political unit in Sagada is the ward, locally known as *dap-ay*. The *dap-ay* is a socio-political institution which exercises control over a defined geographical territory. As a socio-political institution, the *dap-ay* has the following elements: the member families; leaders, a body of customary law, a code of conduct, sanctions, and traditional ceremonies and rituals. The term *dap-ay* also refers to the place where the male members of the ward gather for meetings, rituals and other social activities. As a physical space, the *dap-ay* consists of a hut or structure and an open meeting place made of stone slabs.

Among others, the functions of the *dap-ay* include the scheduling of the agricultural activities, religious rituals, conflict resolution (for both internal conflicts as well as those with other wards or villages), and counselling.

The *dap-ay* is headed by old men, called *amam-a*, who acquire the position not by election, but through *de facto* recognition by ward members. Over the years, these old men, by virtue of their wisdom, experience, articulateness, sense of fairness and good judgment, have earned for themselves the recognition and respect of the ward members.

The *dap-ay* is not kinship-based; that is, membership therein is based, not on a person's family lineage, but on one's place of residence.



Families living within the territorial boundaries of the ward form the membership of the *dap-ay*. The entire membership of the *dap-ay* is called *simpangbon*. In the meetings and discussions of the *dap-ay*, the family is represented by the husband/father. An essential character of the *dap-ay* is that everyone should be duly represented.

Informants claim that for one to be accepted and recognized as a member of the *dap-ay* has great value. As a member or "citizen" of the *dap-ay*, one's family can take part in the various socio-economic, political and religious activities of the ward. One is assured of the care and protection extended by the *amam-a* and the *dap-ay* during periods of need. For instance, when a family member gets sick or dies, at least one of the elders is immediately on hand to inquire after the well-being of the sick and to attend to the needs of the family. It is also through the *dap-ay* that the institution of cooperative labor is practiced. Cooperative labor is extended by the ward especially for the construction of a house. In this case, able-bodied men extend two to three days of free labor. Traditionally, this was also extended for agricultural purposes. Acceptance as a member of good standing in the *dap-ay* is so important, that to be ostracized, much less expelled, is a heavy sanction which may be likened to one's losing his/her citizenship.

Since membership is based on residence, it is possible for a family or individual to change his/her *dap-ay* affiliation. This is allowed when one changes residence by virtue of marriage or other reasons. To change one's *dap-ay*, the individual or family first has to secure the consent of the *dap-ay* to which he originally belongs, then make representations to the elders of the *dap-ay* in his new place of residence.

There are no written laws that govern the citizens or members of the *dap-ay*. Everything is decided upon based on oral tradition and customary law or *ugali*. The *amam-a* preside over meetings of the *dap-ay*. No single elder, however, monopolizes the role of presiding officer in *dap-ay* meetings. Such meetings are exclusively attended and participated in by the men. The number of *amam-a* in a *dap-ay* varies from one ward to another. It appears that this depends on the number of men in the village, at any given time, who may be qualified to occupy such a prestigious position.



While the ward system is admittedly patriarchal, this does not necessarily suggest that the women, or even children, have no hand in the affairs of the *dap-ay* or the *ili*. Before the husband goes to the *dap-ay*, he is expected to discuss with his wife the matters that are up for discussion in the *dap-ay*. The consensus arrived at in his home is what the husband brings with him to the meeting of the *dap-ay*. There have also been instances when the women were allowed to sit as observers in the *dap-ay*. If they wish to express an opinion, they relay this through their representatives.

The meetings in the *dap-ay* are known to be lively and lengthy. During these meetings, the men present the positions of their respective families and participate in democratic discussion. In the end, however, it is the role of the *amam-a* to decide on issues and pass judgment. Decisions and resolutions are reached exclusively through democratic discussion and consensus. Oral history and customary law guide consensus-building and decision-making.

### **The "Supra-Dap-ay"**

Informants claim that the original settlement in Sagada poblacion is what is now Demang. From the original settlement, the population grew and spilled out to what is now Dagdag. At the turn of the century, Patay, which used to be cogonal land, was developed with the establishment of the Anglican Church mission.

There are presently five *dap-ay* in Demang, four in Dagdag, and only one for the whole of Patay. How this number of *dap-ay* in each barangay came about was not clear to the key informants. They could only conjecture that as settlements grew into clusters, each cluster of settlements eventually evolved for itself a *dap-ay*. With regards to Patay, the informants claimed that all residents of that barangay, including the missionaries, are members of the *dap-ay* of Patay.

An interesting observation about the three barangays, i.e., Demang, Dagdag and Patay, which constitute Sagada poblacion is that the residents of all three barangays still hold coordinated ward activities up to the present time. It must be pointed out that each *dap-ay* is autonomous from the other. Inter-*dap-ay* relations are handled by the *amam-a* of each *dap-ay*. Moreover, in the case of the three barangays



of Sagada poblacion, which is also collectively referred to as *ili* (thus, *ili* as used here is not the equivalent of *barangay*), there is a supra-*dap-ay* of sorts, where all the *amam-a* hold meetings to coordinate agricultural and ritual activities, and, as the need arises, to discuss and resolve issues and conflicts that concern all of them. This supra-*dap-ay* is located in Demang. It is assumed that this is because Demang is the original settlement.

An example highlighting the cooperation and coordination of the various *dap-ay* is the celebration of the *dantey* every ten years. The *dantey* is a celebration which re-enacts an important period in the oral history of Sagada when they had to defend the *ili* from the vengeful attacks of surrounding *ili*; i.e., Dallic, Bontoc Central, Mainit, Samoki, etc. In this celebration which lasts for several days, the members of the *dap-ay* re-enact the various stages in the defense of the *ili*, such as the observance of absolute silence, leaving their homes for safer grounds, standing guard in the mountains by the men, the exploits of a local "Joan of Arc," etc. Throughout the celebration, all the ward members eat together in the supra-*dap-ay*. All families make a voluntary contribution of rice and meat from ritual animals to feed the community. Such contributions, while voluntary, also symbolize membership in the *dap-ay*. Contributions are centralized in the supra-*dap-ay*.

### **The Agricultural Calendar**

As in other Cordillera communities, the life of the village or tribe revolves around its relationship with the land and the environment. An important concern of the community is that the environment is wisely used to support life, the village, the tribe. Thus, in Sagada poblacion, the *amam-a* from the various *dap-ay* meet sometime in August to start the new cropping year, and to discuss and schedule the agricultural activities for the year. Specifically, they discuss the various phases in the production of rice/*palay*. Extensive consultations also precede the making of decisions with regard to the agricultural calendar. Families are asked whether or not they are ready to begin the cropping cycle. If not, they may suggest postponement until everyone is sufficiently prepared.

Vegetable production is usually not included in the scheduling of the *ili*'s agricultural calendar, since vegetable production is a relatively recent



development. Besides, vegetable plots mostly consist of backyard gardens.

Each step or phase in the agricultural calendar is accompanied by appropriate rituals, where animals, like native pigs and chickens, are butchered as offerings to *Kabunian* and the spirits. This, according to informants, explains why it is highly uncommon to see a household without its own backyard piggery and a number of chickens. The schedules and the accompanying activities set for the cropping year are to be strictly followed by the members of the various *dap-ay*. It is understood and it has always been the practice that members who violate any of the agreements pertaining to the observance of the activities set for the cropping year will be fined.

The cropping year follows a schedule which makes use of an indigenous calendar that does not necessarily follow the Roman calendar (which is rigidly structured around twelve 30- or 31-day months). Rather, the indigenous calendar consists of months, the names of which are terms describing the months in terms of the abundance or scarcity of food and water. Some months are called by the term describing the agricultural activity that takes place within that period. Other months are called by the names of birds that appear, or the names of the trees or plants that flower or bear fruit at that time. Based on written and oral sources, the agricultural calendar in Sagada usually involves the following schedule and related rituals:<sup>5</sup>

- Bandaway* (approximately August) - start of the new cropping year; a chicken is butchered in the *dap-ay*, then in each household
- Adogna* (approximately September) - *Pangat di bunubon* or planting of seedlings by the elders; chicken is butchered in the *dap-ay*
- Pegew* (approximately October) - *Padag* or a call for farmers to plant their own seedlings or *bunubon*
- Kiling/Lipponed* (approximately November/December) - *Amam-a* designate a model farmer, called Gattan or his wife Bangan, to lead in the transplanting of rice seedlings; a rest day or *obaya* is called, followed by the *raep* or transplanting by the rest of the community
- Innana/Killalaw* (approximately January/February) - a small feast or *begnas* is held
- Opok/Bakakew* (approximately March/April) - a bigger feast or *begnas* is held



*Kitkiti* (approximately May) - the annual mass weddings or *babayas* is held  
*Kiyang/Pannaba* (approximately June/July) - a feast or *cañao* is held;  
 after the harvest, another thanksgiving feast, the *ugas* is held.

Informants stressed that the observance of the cropping calendar and respect accorded to the *amam-a* are one's concrete expression of citizenship in his/her *dap-ay* and *ili*. It is further asserted by some that strict observance of the agricultural calendar assures the members of the *ili* that all households are given equal economic opportunities, with no single household getting the upper hand by starting to plant ahead of the others. Thus, this helps to bring about equitability and social justice.

While the informants admit that there have been adjustments in the observance of the cropping calendar and its accompanying activities and rituals, this customary practice is very much respected and followed up to the present. They cited, for instance, the case of the *obaya* or rest day. Traditionally, when the *obaya* is called, elders put up signs in all passageways to and from the *ili* to bar any person from leaving or entering the *ili* (e.g., to go to the farms) and this was religiously respected. With the growth of Sagada poblacion and the transport system, and given the fact that Sagada poblacion is the gateway to the neighboring municipality of Besao, the passage of people and vehicles is now permitted along the main road.

### ***Conflict Resolution in the Dap-ay***

It is said that when the *amam-a* from the various wards act as one, they are a formidable body, since they sit as lawmakers, law interpreters and judges. There have been instances in recent years where the *amam-a* in the poblacion mediated in the resolution of major conflicts, made representations with the government on behalf of the citizens of their *ili*, and mediated with other barangays in the overlapping claims over water sources. The involvement of the *amam-a* took place despite the existence of an elected local government in Sagada.

All issues, disputes, conflicts and violations of customary law may be brought before the *amam-a* for resolution. Cases submitted to the *amam-a* include theft, wife-battering, divorce, adultery, boundary disputes, questions concerning land ownership and land use, violations of the agreed-upon calendar for agricultural activities, physical injuries, killing,

etc. Families and the ward usually express their preference as to whether the case shall be brought before the *amam-a* or the justice system of the government. On the whole, ward members opt to submit land and boundary disputes for resolution to the *amam-a*. This is because oral history is very important in settling such disputes. Criminal offenses, however, can be resolved by either the indigenous or formal structures.

One celebrated case occurred in 1986 involving a citizen of Sagada *ili* and a citizen of Pasil in Kalinga. This person from Kalinga was killed by a group of young men in Sagada, and the perpetrators of the crime were apprehended by the police. Although the institution of the peace pact or *bodong* does not exist in Sagada, the peace-pact holders or *papangat* of Kalinga made representations with their counterparts, the *amam-a* of Sagada. An out-of-court settlement involving a substantial amount was reached, and all the citizens of Sagada poblacion had to contribute their share since the killing happened in Sagada *ili*. Members of the *ili* had to sell some animals and property in order to raise the amount needed for their contribution. Following the settlement, the case was no longer pursued in court.

Another significant event where the *amam-a* played a crucial role was in the declaration of Sagada as a peace zone at the height of the military operations in and around the town center in the 1980s. Armed guerillas of the NPA and government troopers were asked to leave the town center and spare the same from their clashes.

### **Sanctions**

For infraction of customary laws, the imposition of sanctions vary depending on the nature and gravity of the offense. Sanctions include public censure, exclusion from the rituals and social activities of the *dap-ay*, fines, ostracism and banishment. Less serious offenses include petty theft, slight physical injuries, etc. Grave offenses include killing, wife-battering and adultery.

Fines are the usual form of punishment, although the imposition of fines is usually accompanied by censure from the *ili* for the offender. Instances of public humiliation where an offender would be barred from eating with the other members from a common platter in the *dap-ay* have been reported. Exclusion involves prohibition from participating in any of



the rituals and social and cultural activities of the *dap-ay*. For instance, offenders may not play the gongs during community celebrations. Moreover, informants recall at least one instance of banishment from the *dap-ay* for sexual molestation which is considered a grave offense, thus resulting in the loss of citizenship.

For certain crimes where the offender has been apprehended by the police and imprisoned, the case is usually reviewed by the *amam-a* and the elders' decisions also take into account the imprisonment that the offender has already served. In all cases brought to the bar of justice, the elders review the cases to assess the degree of guilt or innocence of the accused, then make a public announcement regarding the cases and corresponding sanctions, if any.

Finally, all offenders have to undergo a ritual of cleansing and purification, before they are once again accepted into the *dap-ay*. This ritual, called *dawes*, is accompanied by an announcement from the elders that the offender has been sanctioned, but that the penalty has been served.

### ***Interaction with Formal Political Institutions***

While conflicts such as land disputes and even crimes committed within the poblacion are usually brought before the *amam-a* for resolution, this does not mean that the local government is not fulfilling its mandated tasks. On the surface, the local government is the dominant structure. Unobtrusively, however, the traditional systems and institutions, such as *amam-a*, are very much alive in decision-making, especially in the resolution of conflicts.

It appears that the local government is not at all likely to supplant the traditional institutions within the near future. In fact, it is said that while any aspiring local politician may run for office, they do so in consultation with, and with the blessings of, his *dap-ay* and the *amam-a*. Key informants assert that for any local politician to win a seat in the local government, he must woo and win the support of the *amam-a*. It has been pointed out that, rather than the local government structures, it is the national government policies, such as those pertaining to the ownership, utilization and development of natural resources, that pose a greater threat in undermining customary institutions and practices.

It has been observed that the local government operates within the context of local customs and institutions. Local officials are also members of the ward and are, thus, socially obliged to observe the traditions and customary rules of the *dap-ay*. In a sense, therefore, "the formal structures of local government have been "indigenized."

Indigenization of the local government is also seen in the local officials' show of respect for the customary laws on land ownership and utilization and, thus, allow the citizens of the ward to freely use any and all resources found within their properties. A case in point is the use of forest resources. The abundant pine forest cover of Sagada is not simply due to natural forestation. A series of forestation activities, starting early in the century and even up to the post-World War II period, has produced the present dense forests of Sagada. Cogonal lands, and even swidden farms, on occasion, were planted to pine trees and developed into the present-day pine forests. Invoking the principle of usufruct, families who developed these forest lands claim private ownership over them. The local government and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) recognize this private claim, notwithstanding the fact that Sagada is part of the Central Cordillera Forest Reserve. In view of this, owners of the individual forest lands can use the pine logs and lumber for building purposes and fuel. The only restriction, which is also a restriction imposed by the ward, is that these forest resources should be used within the *ili*, and should not be exported outside. There are also designated communal forests in and around the poblacion, and residents can have regulated access to them.

Water supply, as mentioned earlier, is a problem in Sagada poblacion, especially during the dry season. There is a big water source around the boundary of Besao, and the barangay of Bangaan in Sagada which is also being tapped by the local government for Sagada poblacion. This resulted in a conflict regarding the right to use and ownership over this water source. The first attempt to settle the matter was presided over and adjudicated by the *amam-a* of the affected villages. However, no settlement was reached. Then, the local governments of Sagada and Besao, still in consultation with the *amam-a*, sat together for the settlement of the dispute. To date, the matter has not been resolved with finality.



More than the operations and structures of the local government, therefore, it is the national policies regarding resource use and management as well as the intervention of the cash economy that pose greater threats to the stability and sustainability of indigenous institutions in Sagada.

As pointed out earlier, changes in the indigenous institutions have been taking place to accommodate the demands of the growing tourist industry and cash economy in Sagada. Among these changes are the relaxation of the rules governing the *obaya* or rest day and cooperative labor.

A recent development related to this matter is the plan of the Department of Tourism to fully develop the tourism industry in Sagada and undertake the construction of the support infrastructure for tourism, such as hotels, commercial complexes, etc. Recognizing the threat that this poses to the indigenous institutions of Sagada, the local government, in consultation with the *amam-a*, has adopted a resolution expressing their opposition to the further development of the tourism industry in Sagada. They assert that tourism should merely remain at its present level.

### Summary and Conclusions

Sagada is a typical indigenous community. Here, life revolves around the human being, his land and natural environment. Indigenous socio-political institutions have evolved to govern human activities and to regulate the use of the land and the environment. Through the years, these indigenous institutions have served the village well, in terms of supporting life and in creating a sustainable society.

At this point, we refer back to the questions asked at the beginning of this paper.

*Are there indigenous views and practices relating to democracy and citizenship in Sagada?* While the village members do not perceive of their local institutions and practices in terms of the western concepts of democracy and citizenship, it must be said that the values of democracy and citizenship are very much alive in the indigenous community of Sagada. Democratic values and the principles of good citizenship are, in



fact, embedded in the indigenous institutions of Sagada. The socio-political institutions of the *dap-ay* or ward and the *amam-a* or council of elders embody the democratic values of consultation, participation in decision-making, consensus-building, representative government and commitment to the common good.

On the other hand, the socio-political institution of the *simpangbon* is the embodiment of citizenship, i.e., membership and acceptance in a political group, along with its rights, duties, and responsibilities. Citizenship in the indigenous context is highly valued. The rights attached to citizenship are jealously guarded and protected. Obligations are voluntarily fulfilled in order to earn good standing in the community.

*What indigenous institutions exist in the community to safeguard democracy and ensure good citizenship? What are the indigenous social sanctions used in case of violation of customary law?* Oral tradition and customary law provide the rules for exemplary and/or acceptable behavior. They provide the guidelines for the operation of the *dap-ay* and the decision-making of the *amam-a*. The very life of the community revolves around an agricultural calendar that is formulated on the basis of these customary rules. Any deviation from oral tradition and violation of customary law is met with a corresponding sanction. The severity of the sanction corresponds to the gravity of the offense or violation. Sanctions can thus take the form of public apology, ridicule, fines, and outright exclusion from the activities of the *dap-ay*. If one is found guilty of an offense and a sanction is imposed by the elders, the offender must first acknowledge his guilt and undergo a cleansing ritual before he is re-admitted as a *dap-ay* member in good-standing. The ultimate sanction of loss of citizenship is imposed only on offenders who are unwilling to acknowledge their guilt and to fulfill the sanction imposed upon him by the community.

*How do these indigenous values and practices interact with the more formal political systems introduced by the state?* In Sagada, local government structures have not supplanted indigenous structures. Rather, formal government on the local level has been indigenized to operate within the context of customary law. Operations of the local government have not been in conflict with customary law, rather, such operations have taken account of the requirements of customary law in order to ensure acceptance by the local community. Local officials, being



ward members themselves, seek the support of the *amam-a* for their political initiatives, and recognize the customary laws and indigenous institutions that have proven to be effective in maintaining village solidarity and in sustaining the community.

*Are these indigenous values and practices changing? How does the community cope with these changes?* Outside influences continue to impinge upon the indigenous institutions of Sagada. Of all these outside influences, it is our view that national government policies and the cash economy provide the most serious threats to the continued stability of the indigenous culture. Local ward leaders, however, recognize these threats and thus employ various means to minimize the undermining effects of these influences. Even local government officials, who are themselves members of the *dap-ay*, have used the venues open to them to control and regulate the infusion of these outside influences.

In the final analysis, it must be recognized that Sagada may not have a formal democratic and representative government. Formal citizenship is likewise a concept foreign to Sagada. However, the village democracy that is embodied in the *dap-ay* and the *amam-a*, and the indigenous concept of citizenship, that is *simpangbon*, have endured for centuries. Less bureaucratic and structured than formal democracies, it has, nevertheless, been undoubtedly effective in sustaining life in the village and in enhancing peace and social justice. ♦

### Notes

- 1 This paper was prepared for presentation in the National Conference on Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture held on 21-23 September 1996 at the Little Flower Convent, Baguio City.
- 2 Much of the data presented in this section is derived from June Prill-Brett, *A Summary of Cordillera Indigenous Political Institutions*, CSC Working Paper No. 5 (Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center, U.P. College Baguio, 1995).
- 3 As mandated by the 1991 Local Government Code, the Lupon, under the barangay justice system, is the body charged to amicably settle "all disputes except offenses punishable by imprisonment exceeding one year or a fine exceeding five thousand pesos."
- 4 Culled from the *Mountain Province Socio-Economic Profile* (Bontoc, Mountain Province: Mountain Province Planning and Development Office, 1993), and from the *1990 Census of Population and Housing, Mountain Province*, Report No. 2-62N: Population by City, Municipality, and Barangay (Manila: National Statistics Office, 1990).



- 5 Written reference for this section is Corpuz-Diaz, Victoria. "Barangay Patay, Sagada, Mountain Province Tourism and Local Forest Management: Sustainability of a Community Amid the Pines," in *Indigenous Practices and State Policy in the Sustainable Management of Agricultural Lands and Forests in the Cordillera* (Baguio City: Cordillera Studies Center, U.P. College Baguio, 1994), pp. 153-154.

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