



## Migration Characteristics of Communities in the Forestlands in Ifugao, Philippines

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**Abstract** The Ifugao province as a mountainous land of indigenous people, described as a watershed framework that provides domestic and agricultural services. Greater portion of the province was declared as Forestland. Due to increase in population, communities tend to occupy and possess certain part of the forest to provide their basic needs. Understanding the migration characteristics on the Forestlands in the province of Ifugao may lead to a solution harmonizing the role of different stakeholders in maintaining the biological, physical and social aspect of the upland for a sustainable development. The study employed qualitative method of research and adopted the purposive sampling technique, in data gathering wherein, respondents are certified migrant in the forestlands of Ifugao province. It revealed that migration in the Forestlands in Ifugao province is being influenced by many combined factors and being prompted by poverty and aggravated by climate change. Socio-economic aspect is the primary reason why people tend occupy portion of the Forestland. They acquire portions of the Forestland as a source of living as they are engaged in farming as their main source of livelihood.

**Keywords** indigenous people, resource management, land use system

### INTRODUCTION

Philippines is about 30 million hectares, half of which is classified as forestland, 47 percent is classified as alienable and disposable land and the remaining three (3) percent is unclassified forestlands. Alienable and disposable (A&D) lands refer to those areas which may be issued with permanent title and/or used for varying purposes such as for residential, agricultural, commercial and other uses. Of the country's 14.19 million hectares of A&D lands, 9.63 million hectares are already titled (DENR, 2017). On the other hand, Forestlands are lands belonging to the state and cannot be alienated unless provided by law. Much of the Forestland are hilly and mountainous with slope of  $\geq 18\%$  hence are deemed not suitable for agricultural purposes as legally defined by the Revised Forestry Code of 1975 (Esplana and Quizon, 2017).

Most of the Forestlands of the country are occupied by indigenous communities. The Philippines is a culturally diverse country with an estimated 14-17 million indigenous people (IP's) belonging to 110 ethno-linguistic groups, they are concentrated in Northern Luzon and Mindanao and some in Visayas (De Vera, 2007; UNDP, 2010). Indigenous Peoples/Indigenous Cultural Communities (IP/ICC) refer to a group of people sharing common bonds of language, customs, traditions and other distinctive cultural traits, and who have, under claims of ownership since time immemorial, occupied, possessed and utilized a territory (IPRA Law). Thirty three percent (33%) of the IP population is located in the Cordillera Administrative region and sixty one percent (61%) are living in the mountain ranges of Mindanao (UNDP, 2010). As the population in the uplands continuously increasing, the demand for a land to cultivate and for housing is becoming more important thus, the widespread opening of forest for livelihood in the Philippines is pragmatic and natural resources become degraded.

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is composed of six provinces Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and Mountain Province. It is considered as the watershed cradle of the north (UNDP, undated) and characterized as rugged, hilly and mountainous in topography. The region has a total land area of approximately 1.8 million hectares. Almost 1.5 million hectares are classified as forestlands and 0.3 million hectares is alienable and disposable lands (FMB-DENR, 2013). Cordillera culture is characterized by its diversity. The major indigenous cultural communities who occupy the Cordillera are the Ibaloy and southern Kankana-ey in Benguet Province, the Ifugaos of Ifugao Province, the Bontok and northern Kankana-ey of Mountain Province, the Kalingas of Kalinga, the Isnag of Apayao, and the Tingguian of Abra. There are numerous smaller distinct ethnic groups and subgroups within these provinces, such as the Balangao, Kalanguya, and Karao. The groups vary in their political, kinship, economic, and religious organizations (Mendoza and Brett, 2004).

The Ifugao province in particular is a landlocked watershed province bounded by a mountain range to the north and west that tempers into undulating hills towards the south and the east. The highest elevation is 2,523 meters above sea level (masl) with the rice terraces lying above 500 masl. Ifugao province is located at the southern portion of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) found at the heart of Luzon Island of the Philippines. It is home to the indigenous peoples who call themselves “Ifugaos” and is host to one of the world-renowned rice terraces clusters that the UNESCO World Heritage List of cultural and natural properties considered to be of “outstanding universal value. In the land Classification of The Philippines 2013 as published by the Forest Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (FMB-DENR, 2013) Ifugao province has approximately 251,778 hectares and 90 % (226,369 has.) of which is declared as forestland only 10% (25,409 has.) is considered as Alienable and disposable lands (A&D). The province has growing population and communities in the forestlands are tremendously increasing.

This study aimed to examine the migration characteristics and identify major drivers of forestland occupation in the province of Ifugao, Philippines.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized qualitative research. Data were gathered through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to the Forestland migrants in Ifugao, Philippines. Moreover, the data were validated through a key informant interview (KII). Likewise, actual field visit was conducted to document current scenarios of upland farming, resource management and practices in the area.

### **Sampling and Respondents**

Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. Identified Forestland migrants that represents different sectors of the upland community were interviewed for this purpose, particularly sectors coming from youth, Barangay officials, elders, upland famers, women’s group and technical personnel from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and Department of Agriculture (DA).

### **Use of Vignette in the Study**

The focus group discussion (FGD) in each of the study sites were conducted in a panel and consolidated in a common understanding of the respondents in a scheduled interview session with the researchers per group or representation in the area. There are seven (7) interview sessions with the different respondents to represent the Forestland migrants (n = 5), Barangay officials (n = 5), elders (n = 3), upland farmers (n = 5), representative from women’s group (n = 5), and technical personnel from the Department of Agriculture (n = 5), and Department of Environment and Natural

Resources (n = 5). On the completion of the data gathering through the focus group discussion (FGD), each group were asked on their understanding on the migration and migration characteristics in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines. particularly on the pattern of migration related to their age, educational attainment, ethnicity, gender, marital status, religion, culture, income, source of income, farming practices, crops being planted and natural resources management since they are living in a vulnerable forest landscape in the province. This vignette pattern was applied in the three selected study sites in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines.

The consolidated result of the study was presented to the different respondent representatives through key informant interview (KII) to confirm the veracity and reliability of the data gathered during the focus group discussion.

### Study Sites

The municipalities of province were stratified into three categories according to elevation: The low elevation (192 - 500 meters above sea level); the Mid-elevation (501 - 1000 meters above sea level) and; High Elevation (Above 1000 meters above sea level). To represent the mentioned categories of the different municipalities of the province, convenient method was considered in the selection of the study sites. Accordingly, Barangay Little Tadian in the municipality of Alfonso Lista, Barangay Itab in the Municipality of Aguinaldo and Barangay Nattum in Mayoyao were selected to represent the Low elevation, Mid-elevation and High elevation, respectively.

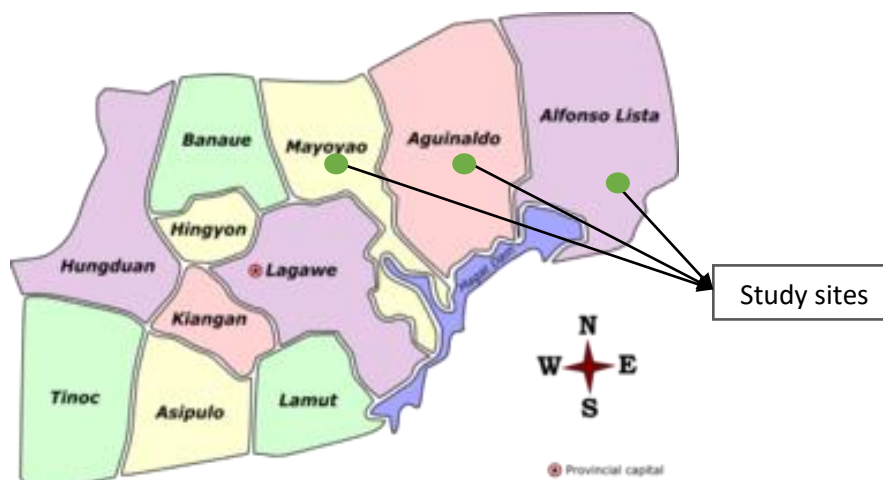


Fig. 1 Map of Ifugao, Philippines

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Migration can be a temporary outlet for population pressure but often it only creates a new population pressure and new environmental scenario in the area of in-migration. The typical migration pattern worldwide has been from rural to urban areas (Amacher et al., 1998) however, this pattern has reversed in the 1980's particularly in the South East Asia and the Amazon as migrants leaving impoverished cities to settle in sparsely inhabited upland and forest frontiers and Philippines is an example of this situation (Amacher and Hyde, 1996).

### Summary of the Vignette

The study focused on the migration characteristics of communities in the Forestlands in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines. This study was participated by the different stakeholders of the forestland of Ifugao in Philippines such as migrants, women's group, elders, Barangay officials, technical personnel from the DA and DENR respectively. As a result of the study, migration to the forestland in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines confirmed three (3) major causes to include

cultural, demographic and socio-economic factors that is consistent with the findings of Li et.al (2014) consequently, there are factors affecting migration intentions in an ecological area such as demographic factors, socio-economic factors and other factors (political-economic factors and environmental factors).

### **Three (3) Major Causes of Migration in the Forestlands in Ifugao, Philippines**

**A. Cultural factor:** Majority of the Forestland settlers in Ifugao in the Philippines belongs to the Indigenous People (IP) of the province, some are coming from the neighboring provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela, and Mountain Province. Indigenous people in Ifugao have a natural connection to forest resources because it is their nature to engage in hunting wild animals for food, and sustainable forestry as they acquire lumber for domestic purposes in their woodlots (Muyong). They also extract wild honey for their personal consumption and some are for sale as they augment their income. More importantly, it is their culture to seek for a fertile land for agriculture production or technically known as *kaingin*.

**B. Demographic factors:** Demographic factors are the general indication of a group in the general population in the forestland in the province of Ifugao such as age, gender, marital status and religion.

Accordingly, migration to the forestlands in the province by the community happens usually during the young to middle adult ages from 18-38 years old because during this stage individuals are active explorer, traveler and adventurous as they seek job, belongingness, enjoy the value of nature, and in the search of partner in life. In addition, people would like to settle in a place wherein they are going to construct their own houses, established sustainable source of living, invest time and properties in an area, and this is usually happening in the young adult stage. Consistent with the argument of Abu et al. (2014) that during older age, people may not migrate because their attachment to their community tends to be stronger than that of younger age. On the other hand, male have higher incidence of migration in the Forestlands in Ifugao, Philippines because they are usually the once engaged in the search of livelihood for the family including acquisition of land to be tilled, hunt for wild animals, harvest wild plants and fruits. Moreover, establishment and settlement in an area is a role of males in the upland particularly in the province of Ifugao in the Philippines.

Majority of the respondent in the different locations in accordance to the criteria set in this study pointed that families occupy portion of the forestland in the province of Ifugao with their relatives and establish a community in the area. Communities in the Forestlands of Ifugao is composed of different spiritual sectorial belief such as Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, and Baptist Ministry. Accordingly, their religious belief binds them together and guide them for a peaceful and happy well-being. The significance of Religion to the migration characteristics of communities is relevant to the interpretation of Hirschman (2004) that relatives and distant individuals move towards an area of worship and religious networks of similar belief, supported by the idea of Portes and Rumbaut (2006) that religious practices is a source of social capital and an important variable in determining the path of assimilation within the segment of social structure. However, religion do not figure predominantly in migration (Cadge and Ecklund, 2007).

**C. Socio-economic factors:** Socio-economic condition is an important factor in shaping development goals of a community. In general, it analyses how economic activity affects and is shaped by social processes. It is one of the major bases in the determination of inequalities and importance in development. In this particular study, educational attainment, household size, occupation and land holdings were considered in the migration characteristics of communities in the Forestlands in Ifugao, Philippines.

Majority of the Forestland migrants in Ifugao in the Philippines are Elementary graduate and high school level, some populations are high school graduate and college level, only few of the populations are considered professional who finished their formal education in college and earned their Baccalaureate Degrees. In terms of household size, large family can describe the composition of Forestland migrants in the area, which is characterized by an average of eight (8) household

members that is composed of a father, mother and children. On the other hand, the primary occupation of the migrants is upland farming, some are involved in wood carving, and carpentry.



**Fig. 2 Kaingin within the forestlands in Ifugao, Philippines**

Generally, families are moving towards the Forestlands in Ifugao in the Philippines because of socio-economic pressure brought about by poverty and aggravated by climate change. People tend to occupy certain portion of the Forestland to acquire land holdings for them to establish their houses and more importantly to have lands to till and generate income for subsistence. They open portions of the Forestlands by *slash and burn* through cutting and clearing the original vegetation and are planted with agricultural crops such as upland rice, corn, vegetables and some portion are converted into grazing land. Accordingly, planting of agricultural crops in the Forestland can be harvested in 3-4 months and generate income in a shorter period of time compared to engagement of tree farms or tree plantation that will take 10-15 years before the fast-growing tree species can be harvested and at least 30 years for an indigenous or native species. Moreover, their engagement in agricultural production can provide basic needs for their family such as food, clothing and medicine, and send their children to school. Upland farmers generally cultivate portions of the Forestland on the basis of occupancy, residency and agricultural engagement in the area. In the absence of any tenure instrument, their cultural rights as the original tenant over the land is being respected by the community.

The trend of migration to the Forestland in the Ifugao in the Philippines is increasing, communities are already in place and agricultural production areas are becoming dominant in the area. The increasing number of populations in the Forestland were observed to have negative impact on the natural agro-ecological system in the area. As a result of agricultural production in the moderate to steep slopes areas in the Forestland, there is a significant increase in soil erosion, and siltation in the water ways. Biodiversity of flora and fauna also are affected since the crops being grown by the communities are not indigenous particularly the vegetables, and corn that are cultured for a medium to large scale production. Moreover, the introduction of chemicals in the maintenance of their farms particularly herbicides, and insecticides brought damages to both micro and macrobiotic diversity of the area.

## CONCLUSION

The migration characteristics of communities in the Forestlands in Ifugao in the Philippines is characterized by a dynamic and complex cultural, demographic, and socio-economic factor. Nowadays, the continuous increase in the population in the Forestland is brought about by poverty that cause families to occupy, possess, and utilize portion of the Forestland for agricultural production for subsistence and provision of basic needs by the people.

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