

FROM RIVER TO TABLE: THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINING AN INDIGENOUS FOOD PRODUCTION IN A TRADITIONAL RIVERINE COMMUNITY

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Background/Rationale

- ◆ The study was conducted to describe the roles of women in sustaining an indigenous food production in traditional riverine communities and to identify the factors that help in its sustainability.
- ◆ In most traditional societies, fishing as means of food production is usually dominated by men especially from the making of gears and the act of fishing itself.
- ◆ In some riverine communities in Panay Island, Philippines, the case is different as women played active roles in the production and in the continuance of indigenous practices and beliefs.
- ◆ Documentation of the active roles of women in production of indigenous food and their specific influence to its sustainability will help us understand how indigenous belief and practices protect natural resources from unsustainable practice.
- ◆ This study will help in preserving the knowledge of indigenous practices and beliefs concerning food and their sustainable production from threats of modern influences.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To describe the roles played by women in the production of *binabak*, an indigenous food which makes use of freshwater prawn *Macrobrachium spp.* as primary ingredient and;
- 2) To identify the factors responsible for the sustainability of production of *binabak* as an indigenous food.

Discussion/Findings

- ◆ *Binabak* is a popular dish in Pandan. It is made of *patuyaw* (freshwater prawns) as the main ingredient with minced onions, ginger, salt and *bangien* (tender coconut meat), and then wrapped together by the leaves of *hagikhik* (a native plant), and steamed cooked to achieve a spicy taste.
- ◆ Women make scoop net which are used for fishing of freshwater prawns. They also help men in making traps and join them in fishing.
- ◆ In the entire process of making *binabak*, women with their female children played active roles, from preparation to cooking up to marketing.
- ◆ The production of *Binabak* has reached as far as United States and Europe especially for natives of Pandan who worked or settled abroad and its demand is high during summer and Christmas vacation.
- ◆ The fear among natives that an illness called *angul* will be inflicted to them as punishment by the *taglugar* (environmental spirits) if they improperly handle the fishing and cooking of aquatic resources help the sustainability of *patuyaw* (freshwater prawn). *Angul* is an illness which is characterized by mild to severe headache and neck pain that tilts the head to one side which could lead to death. This belief continues to exist because of *babayan* or *manugbulong* (traditional folk healers who are mostly women) who attend to and cure persons believed to be inflicted with *angul*.
- ◆ The craft of making *binabak* is learned by female children through observing their elders as they participate in production. They serve as traditional channels of knowledge transfer as they share the beliefs and practices surrounding the production of *binabak* through storytelling and interaction with other children.

The factors that affect the sustainability of *binabak* are:

- 1). Livelihood opportunities that are created;
- 2). The traditional channels of oral communications and;
- 3). Continuing observance of indigenous beliefs and practices concerning to the river in general and prawn in particular.



Women with their children help in production of *Binabak*



A woman teaches her granddaughter to fish *patuyaw* (freshwater prawns).

Methodology

Key Informant Interviews :

8 Key informants in the communities of Barangay Talisay, and 3 Key informants in Sitio Dumili in Barangay Centro Sur in Pandan, Antique, Philippines.

Participant-observation method:

Author, as resident of one of the locale, has direct knowledge about the food and the related beliefs about it since childhood.



Binabak



Patuyaw



Ingredients for Binabak



A woman making a scoop net.

Conclusions

- ◆ Women play active roles in production of *binabak*, from making of fishing gears to its marketing.
- ◆ Women serve as traditional channels of oral communication which pass on the knowledge of the craft of *binabak* making to next generations.
- ◆ Women influence the sustainability of *binabak* production as they mostly serve as *babayan* or *manugbulong* which continue to reinforce the indigenous beliefs on guarding against abusive fishing and improper handling of aquatic resources like freshwater prawn.

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