



## Finding Common Ground: Factors that Unify Farming Communities in Leyte and Samar

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the interplay of identified common grounds (e.g., traditions, ancient rites, religious beliefs) that impacts on unifying farming communities in Leyte and Samar. Through a qualitative approach, the researchers explored how shared values, rituals, and a sense of identity stemming from these cultural elements promote collaboration, sustainable agricultural practices, and community cohesion among these farming communities. With the constraints present, farmers still can navigate these challenges by embracing innovative strategies that balance tradition with modernity. The implications of this study underscore the importance of preserving cultural heritage while fostering adaptive approaches to promote unity and sustainable agriculture

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### KEYWORDS:

Common Ground, Traditions, Ancient rites, Religious beliefs, Farming Communities, Unity, Collaboration, Sustainable practices

### INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is considered an agricultural country because 47% of its land area is agricultural land (Atilano, n.d.). Despite that, the agriculture sector is not thriving as expected.

In fact, the contribution of agriculture in the country's GDP has remained below 11% since 2016 (*Philippines: GDP Share of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing Sector 2022, 2023*). This low performance is due to slow expansion of factors of production and weak growth in total factor productivity (Briones, 2021).

Agricultural practices vary among each region. In fact, farming villages in Leyte and Samar have distinct cultures, traditions, and customs that have evolved. Despite their differences, these groups have the same objective of preserving their livelihoods and ensuring food security in the region. As a result, finding common ground to unite different populations is critical to creating sustainable farming techniques.

The Leyte and Samar regions rely significantly on agriculture, especially rice farming, as their main industry.

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This custom has been practiced for many years and is firmly ingrained in the environment, socioeconomic status, and culture of the region. In the past, the Waray community engaged in farming and fishing employing techniques like the Bayanihan system, in which neighbors cooperate to help one another with activities like planting and harvesting.

The production of coconuts is also substantial, and a variety of products made from coconuts, such as coconut wine (tuba), support the local economy. In the area, numerous fruits, abaca, sugar, and other commodities are grown. Crop rotation and intercropping are examples of traditional agricultural methods that are essential to maintaining the productivity of the land and protecting the environment. Given how vulnerable the area is to natural calamities, the communities are united in their concern for environmental conservation.

The region still faces difficulties despite these agricultural approaches. Typhoons and other pests have hampered economic growth and increased the rate of poverty. For instance, the devastation caused by Typhoon Yolanda in 2013 had a significant impact on fishing operations, rice harvests, and coconut trees. The destruction of abaca plants also has a severe impact on related businesses like the production of paper and rope.

Thus, Leyte and Samar depend primarily on agriculture, especially the cultivation of rice and coconuts, for their subsistence. Their culture is fundamentally based on old-fashioned farming techniques, social customs, and

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environmental awareness. However, the area is susceptible to natural disasters, which can cause economic difficulties and decreases in agricultural production.

The study uncovers the elements that bring agricultural communities together in Leyte and Samar, as well as to investigate cultural practices and their influence on agriculture. Despite cultural and historical differences, agricultural communities in Leyte and Samar share comparable aspirations and practices that have enabled them to preserve their livelihoods. Understanding these unifying characteristics is critical for developing sustainable agricultural methods and policies that may help improve the lives of farmers in the region.

The study answers the following: What are the cultural practices and beliefs that contribute to the unification of farming communities in Leyte and Samar? How do traditional farming practices and knowledge passed down from generation to generation contribute to the unification of farming communities in Leyte and Samar? In what ways do farming communities in Leyte and Samar cooperate and collaborate with each other to achieve their common goals of sustaining their livelihoods and ensuring food security in the region? How does the reliance on traditional farming practices and the concern for the environment impact sustainable agricultural practices and food security in Leyte and Samar?

With this, the study focused on the farmers of the islands of Samar and Leyte only, thus the data collected may not be applicable for other areas because it only covered the farming communities aforementioned provinces, particularly the farming culture and practices.

Though the lack of research on the factors that unify farming communities in Leyte and Samar is a limitation of this study, this is also one of its strengths. The said limitation implies that this study can be a baseline data for the factors that unify farming communities in Leyte and Samar. Currently, there are no research articles that use the same locale.

Another strength of this study is its relevance to the on-going health crisis despite the new normal being imposed, precautionary measures are still implied and in cases wherein another lockdown will be imposed given the circumstances, the need to increase or apply cash transfers during pandemic or emergencies as a form of assistance would be managed effectively by the policymakers.

Lastly, identifying the common ground among these communities will start collaboration amongst farmers in the region, and it will be a medium of exchange of knowledge and an avenue to develop solutions to common challenges like adoption of practices.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Samar and Leyte islands was chosen as the area of the study specifically in municipalities near Tacloban City, Leyte and Sta. Rita, Samar, which are both located in Region 8 or Eastern Visayas.

In order to investigate the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of agricultural communities in Leyte and Samar, the study used a qualitative method. Purposive sampling was the technique chosen for this study. This is a non-probability sampling method because respondents are chosen based on criteria, availability and ease of access. Thus, the respondents are farmers who are educated about farming techniques and have lived in the areas for an extended length of time.

In addition, the study utilized interviewing and secondary data in collecting data. There was also a well-organized semi-structured interview guide to keep track of the important data to be collected while striving to gain a deeper understanding about the aforementioned agricultural communities.

Before starting the interview, a printed consent form was given to the respondents in order to respect their right to participate in the study. Through data saturation, the sample size of the study was determined by the interviewer because there was no new information being acquired and there was no time limit in every interview. Lastly, the data collected will be analyzed through thematic analysis because its approach can be flexible with the different kinds of data acquired in the study (Nowell et al., 2017).

## RESULTS

Delving into the the findings of this study through the gathered data, the researchers have uncovered how shared values and practices bridge geographical divide between Samar and Leyte, shedding light on the role of cultural elements in fostering good relationship, collaboration, and a sense of community among farmers of different geographical and cultural roots. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of secondary data sources, the researchers gained insights into the ways in which found factors or common grounds contribute to a more unified and resilient farming community. The subsequent sections provide a comprehensive overview of the key themes that emerged from the study's results, offering a deeper understanding of the implications of the identified factors to the farming community.

### *Traditions, Beliefs, Ancient Rites, and Religion*

It has appeared that the customs and farming culture can be linked to specific ancient rituals of nature worship after examining the interview summaries and witnessing behaviors in several municipalities of Leyte and Samar. The addition of prayers, the use of Christian symbols, and a change in focus from using natural symbols as potent magical tools to God as the source of all blessings have all contributed

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to the Christianization and alteration of various rituals throughout the course of four hundred years of Catholic influence. A further examination might be sparked by highlighting some of the parallels or contrasts between numerous municipalities in Samar and Leyte.

One biggest factor that connects the culture of farming communities of Samar and Leyte islands is the traditions and beliefs of the ancient rites and the influence of the religion. Traditions and belief of farmers from Samar and Leyte islands that have been gathered by the researchers are the following:

1. The precise time that the harvesting ceremony should begin varies per municipality. It could happen the day the real harvest begins or two weeks beforehand, as it does in Palo on the East Coast and Villaba on the West Coast. It is also feasible at any other period in between these two extremes. In other cases, the festivities last for several days. The master of ceremonies in the Tacloban region harvests at least a handful of rice every day for three straight days by himself in the field. People will assume he is "*nahahago*" (weary of work) if he doesn't comply, and even if the rice is well-grown, he won't benefit from the harvest. In Leyte and Samar, it is customary for the person who begins harvesting to make sure that it occurs either on a day of the "Cabog-os" full moon, "*Guimata*" first quarter moon, or "*Maghi-abot*" moon rise at sunset. The ocean tide is particularly high on those days, and the farmer prays to God that the harvest will be as bountiful as the tide. If the high tide occurs at night, the ceremonies take place at high tide. Towns on the interior of this island observe the "*Cabog-os*," "*Guimata*," or "*Maghi-abot*" day, but do not time their celebrations with the hour of high tide.

2. Some local governments in Leyte and Samar are quite stringent about upholding the ritual's secret. The master of ceremonies must not be visible, according to Villaba. He is not allowed to answer if he is spoken to while traveling to the rice field since doing so would render the ceremonies ineffective. Both Quinapondan in the southeast of Samar and La Paz in the heart of Leyte sternly enforce confidentiality. Other regions, like Tacloban, are less strict; even two people can attend the ceremony there. However, because this is a solemn ceremony, the master of ceremonies should also carry out the rituals in silence.

3. The landowner serves as the master of ceremonies in Villaba. In other regions, such as La Paz, Palo, Tacloban, and some areas of Samar, old people who are familiar with the ceremonies are asked to execute them; a close relative is ideal. The ritual's execution procedure is kept secret by the master of ceremonies. When he gets old, he gives the secret to the family member he feels is the most suitable. It's possible that this isn't the oldest child or son. The ceremonies themselves come in a wide variety. There are two main categories that can be identified. the traditional

form, which worships nature, and the more modern version, which worships God. The latter kind, which is more prevalent, has altered and christianized nature worship.

4. The pagan Filipino farmer made sacrifices to the gods who brought him rice, including the sun, moon, rain, thunder, and lightning. During the planting season, he made goodwill sacrifices for them, and again, in some way, during the harvest season, he made thanksgiving sacrifices. Adoration of the ancestors, or "anito," went hand in hand with adoration of nature. The farmer either thought that benevolent spirits known as *encantados* dwelt in the field guarding his crops or that his deceased ancestors who had previously been farmers served as the field's protectors. Therefore, the farmer also revered them. This ceremony has been partially retained in areas where the Catholic Church's influence has only been sporadic and minimal. The practice of "anito" worship is essentially extinct in Catholic strongholds like Tacloban and Palo.

5. Securing permission for clearing a field: In Kawayan (North-West Leyte), the farmer consults the land's resident spirit before clearing a new rice crop. To feed the spirit, he kills a pig and a white rooster. He then moves on to clean up the field. A farmer who wished to cut a section of forest to sow rice is the subject of a legend in Northwest Leyte. As soon as he began to work, he suddenly developed a fear that "*agtas*," or Black spirits, would reside here. As a result, he stopped and made an effort to leave for home. But he was punished by the "*agtas*". He was lost in the wilderness and unable to find his way back to the house. He recalled the time-tested method for returning home after becoming fatigued from wandering around. He quickly changed his clothing by flipping them inside out. The farmer eventually made it back home, but he was worried that if he kept cutting the forest, "*agtas*" may punish him even more. So, he called a hoax physician, who advised him to buy a white pig and a red rooster. 6 o'clock p.m. The farmer and the quack physician visited the area where *agtas* were thought to live. When he arrived, the charlatan knelt down and prayed before yelling, "You *agtas*-living in this place where my friend is making a clearing, I command you to go away!" The home payments are listed below. He then flung the white pig and the red rooster into the forest before leaving and telling them to go immediately because if they didn't, he would kill them all. The farmer continued the clearing the following day. If the farmer hates his neighbor or any other person who owns a forest or has Dig trees growing in his parcel, the farmer would mention the name of his enemy so that the "*encantados*" would move to his enemy's place and plant their trees there. This is how it is done in another place near Pastrana (Central Leyte) when the farmer is clearing a forest for planting.

6. Spirit meal before planting: A 45-kilometer drive from Abuyog distant barrio still practices an

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elaborate religious ceremony for the "*anito*." Only a "*sakayan*" or "*banca*" (small boat) can access this remote barrio. The majority of residents of this neighborhood only visit the city once a year, during Lent. This helps to explain why some old habits still persist. The owner makes a substantial lunch before planting season that includes pork, fish, rice, root crops, and other pleasures. The meal is open to friends and family. Before the meal actually begins, the farm owner brings the tastiest food and beverages to the location where planting will take place along with members of his family and guests. There, people pray, sing, and offer delicious foods to the ghosts of their departed and the land's invisible proprietors. Strange names are uttered, and the spirits are invited to partake in the banquet. They return to the farmstead for a party that involves eating, drinking, and dancing after the wedding. The owner goes to the field early the following morning. He won't plant if he discovers that there is still enough food from the previous day because he thinks the spirits will punish him for planting and are against his aim. If he discovers that the majority of the food has been eaten, he returns home, summons his helpers, and planting begins. He thinks that the spirits are on his side and that a bountiful harvest would result. The planting rites of Balangiga, West Samar, are a little different. Rice and two chickens, a male and a female, are cooked in a pot once the field has been prepared for planting and the seedlings are ready. Early in the morning, the master of ceremonies—whom Balangiga farmers believe has amazing powers—goes by himself with his cooked rice and poultry to the planting site. On a tiny table facing the rice field, he arranges the food. Next, he prays to God for the deceased and for protection from bad spirits. Only the master of ceremonies is aware of the exact words of the prayer since, in the farmers' opinion, these abilities are inherited. The theme of this prayer, the farmers were informed, is to summon the dead and allow them to feast on the rice as their portion of the previous harvest. They anticipate having a higher yield from their upcoming planting thanks to the spirits. In order for the chickens to fly off with the evil spirits to a faraway region where they can no longer trouble the farmer, the master of ceremonies also commands the evil spirits to feast on the chickens. The master of ceremonies will invite or summon his deceased ancestors to the feast, then depart the location for four to five hours. After returning, he will carry the food from the table to his house, where his family will eat in the belief that the spirits have already eaten. Rice planting may start the following day. The farmers of Balangiga claim that one family and its close relatives have possessed the amazing skills of the master of ceremonies for decades. Only one man in Balangiga currently possesses these abilities. His kid will succeed him after his passing. He would face consequences if he declined because of his position and education. The farmers think that he would be punished by the spirits. He

would either go blind, become paralyzed, or have his face rot. Then the closest cousin to that family will succeed as the next leader.

7. Promoting growth, the owner picks up a handful of rice once the planting is complete and scatters it in all directions, stating, "This is for the animals and insects that intend to taste my plants. In exchange for your kindness and cooperation, I sincerely wish that you protect my plants from danger and keep an eye on my plantation until harvest time. The farmer kills a red rooster when the rice plants are seven inches tall. He circles the rice field while covered in its blood. He applies a drop of blood on the rice leaves at each corner of the field. When he returns to the starting point, he offers a prayer to the spirits asking them to look after his plants. The name of this performance is Pagpunas.

8. Curing sick rice - When rice doesn't thrive in one area of a field that has been planted with it, the landowner consults a "*tambalan*" or quack physician. He thinks that a spirit became enraged in that specific field corner and murdered a few of the rice plants. In order to prepare a supper for the spirit and apologize to him, the owner enlists the help of the "*tambalan*" and attempts to appease him with a tasty feast. Another method of curing diseased rice plants is the method of "*pagluon*" or smoking, which is performed in many towns of Leyte and Samar. He also apologizes to the souls of the prior landowners and begs pardon for having abandoned them. The owner walks through the rice field carrying a form of incense called "*camangyan*." As the farmer walks throughout the field, the incense is kept smoking in a coconut shell with a fire inside. He prays to St. Isidro while on the move (this is a Christian influence; in other regions, there is the invocation of spirits) in order to ward off illnesses, protect his plants, and increase the yield of the rice field. The sole son or daughter of a family may be employed by the farmer of a rice field affected with the disease in some areas of Western Samar to treat the illness. This individual constructs a fire at the edge of the rice field using animal skin and leaves that give off a lot of smoke. Additionally, he scatters some Lysol along the field's edges or sides. After that, he circles the field three times. When it is dark and even the birds have flown to their resting place, this is done.

9. Spirit meal before the harvest time - The landlord asks his most dependable tenant to serve as master of ceremonies "*paratikang*" as soon as the rice is ready for harvest. The tenant's wife gathers a few gantas of the new palay and prepares suman and other delectable delicacies. Along with cooked chicken or pig, she also makes strong black tea, strong chocolate, and a couple glasses of tuba. After that, the drinks are distributed around the small portions of food that are set in the middle of a small portable table. The master of ceremonies transports the meal to the field where the palay is to be harvested while being escorted

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by family, friends, and members of his family. The only people to enter the field are the master of ceremonies and two close assistants; everyone else stays roughly 50 feet away. The master of ceremonies calls out the names of the spirits and invites them to come and eat in a loud but courteous voice. To reassure the spirits that the food and drinks are acceptable, the master of ceremonies and his two assistants nibble on each type of food and drink on the table. With the spirits' approval, who are already supposed to be enjoying the celebration, they all depart after sampling.

The same individuals who carried out the ritual in the evening dispose of the food and table, which are left in the same location until the following morning. Many locations in Western Samar follow comparable customs, however the presentation of food and drink varies slightly. So, in Basey, food is made without any spices because it is thought that spirits do not enjoy salt and spices. Starting around six o'clock in the evening in Basey, the master of ceremonies takes over. He invokes the ghosts of the mountains, the deceased ancestors, and the rice fields. He expresses gratitude to them for not damaging his rice in any way. The villagers think that if this ceremony of thanksgiving is skipped, the spirits will gradually take the rice away. This Leyte and Samar Rice Ritual is clearly animistic in nature. They are carried out in remote barrios where there has not been much Catholic influence. Despite being baptized Catholics, the population is mostly uninformed about Catholic theology. They easily combine their Catholic faith with the worship of spirits. It should be noted that these spirits are neither worshiped or adored in the traditional sense. The only one who is given the highest worship and adoration is God, who is thought to have created these spirits. Due to their perceived strength, humans choose to play things cautious while dealing with both God and the spirits. Many middle-class and upper-class Filipinos are unaware of this animistic religion; before being presented with the evidence, they did not believe the writer. Rich landowners were aware that some of their tenants engaged in unusual rituals, but few understood the significance of these practices. They claimed that if they didn't allow their tenants to do these rituals, they would worry and be sad.

With the sustainability of the farming industry in our Region, through their agro ecological characteristics, traditional agricultural techniques in Samar and Leyte have the capacity to adapt to and reduce climate change. They boost agroecosystem resilience and agrobiodiversity. They also use inexpensive, energy-efficient, and locally accessible materials. The expertise of traditional agriculture is preserved by indigenous people. In a changing environment, traditional agriculture is a viable alternative strategy for producing food sustainably. Traditional agriculture not only helps to reduce climate change, but it also helps to protect human health, manage natural resources, save energy, and

preserve socioecological integrity. As examples of best practices in Samar and Leyte for an agricultural climate-smart strategy, consider agroforestry, intercropping, crop rotation, cover cropping, conventional organic composting, and integrated crop-animal husbandry. These methods improve agricultural sustainability which is a big factor in having food security while also reducing climate change.

### **DISCUSSION**

Traditions, ancient rites, and religious beliefs play a significant role in unifying farmers in Region 8. These cultural elements provide a shared foundation that brings farmers together, fostering a sense of identity, community, and purpose. The interplay of traditions and religious beliefs can have profound implications for agricultural practices, social cohesion, and sustainability. These ancient rites and traditions often form the core of a community's identity. On the other hand, religious beliefs and rituals passed down through generations create a sense of belonging among farmers, linking them to their cultural heritage. And the shared values rooted in these traditions, such as respect for nature, gratitude for the land, and communal cooperation, serve as guiding principles that shape farmers' interactions and decisions. Also, many ancient agricultural practices are deeply intertwined with religious beliefs and rituals. These practices often emphasize the importance of conserving natural resources, practicing crop rotation, and maintaining soil fertility. Thus, the influence of religion encourages farmers to adopt sustainable methods, as they view their stewardship of the land as a sacred duty. Furthermore, religious gatherings provide opportunities for farmers to come together, share experiences, and offer mutual support. These events strengthen social bonds and encourage cooperation, facilitating knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices. The sense of community nurtured by religious activities can lead to collaborative efforts in resource management and disaster preparedness.

In terms of its implications, the preservation of ancient traditions and religious practices helps in maintaining cultural resilience in farming communities, safeguarding unique identities in the face of globalization and modernization. The fusion of religious beliefs and agricultural practices also contributes to sustainable farming by promoting ecofriendly methods, resource conservation, and a holistic approach to land management, and these shared rituals and beliefs create a strong sense of unity, reducing social fragmentation and enhancing cooperation among them. This cohesion is vital for community development and effective collective action. In essence, the traditions, ancient rites, and religious beliefs of farmers have profound implications for their unity, sustainable practices, and overall wellbeing. Recognizing and harnessing these cultural elements can lead to more resilient, empowered, and

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harmonious farming communities. However, it is noteworthy that despite these implications there are still present constraints due to these factors that unify farmers. While these cultural elements have many positive implications, they also present challenges and limitations as strong attachment to traditional practices and religious beliefs can lead to resistance when introducing new and potentially more efficient agricultural methods. This resistance might hinder the adoption of modern technologies and innovations. Furthermore, might not align with modern sustainability goals, potentially leading to environmental degradation. This strong adherence to traditions might discourage experimentation and innovation, preventing farmers in the region from exploring new, more effective approaches to farming which may result in changing economic, social, or environmental conditions that may challenge the viability of certain traditional practices or religious rituals, leading to tensions or conflicts within the community.

Navigating through these constraints requires a delicate balance between honoring cultural heritage and embracing positive change. Effective strategies should involve respectful engagement with local communities, integrating traditional knowledge with modern approaches, and promoting inclusive and sustainable agricultural practices that respect both traditions and the evolving needs of farming communities. Thus, despite the constraints associated with the influence of traditions, ancient rites, and religious beliefs, farmers can still find ways to be unified. Overcoming these challenges requires thoughtful approaches that respect cultural heritage while addressing the limitations. It is through establishing a platform for open communication and dialogue among farmers, community leaders, and stakeholders can help address concerns and find common ground. This can lead to a better understanding of the constraints and how they can be managed. Also, farmers can adapt traditional practices to align with modern sustainability goals by blending age-old wisdom with innovative techniques that promote both cultural heritage and environmental stewardship. Thus, emphasizing the value of both tradition and innovation within the farming community can create a balanced approach that respects cultural heritage while embracing positive change. Constraints related to traditions and beliefs may pose challenges, but they do not necessarily prevent farmers from finding common ground and being unified. Through a combination of dialogue, adaptation, education, and inclusive practices, farmers can navigate these constraints and leverage their shared values to work together towards a sustainable and cohesive agricultural community.

### CONCLUSION

The identified factors unifying farmers in Samar and Leyte carries both transformative potential and inherent

challenges. These cultural elements serve as threads that weave together the fabric of agricultural communities, fostering shared values, sustainable practices, and a sense of identity. However, as we have discussed, constraints such as resistance to change and potential environmental impact can test the strength of this unity. It is evident that recognizing and leveraging the unifying power of traditions requires a nuanced and thoughtful approach. Balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with the imperative for progress and sustainability demands innovative solutions that bridge the gap between past and present. The implications of these traditions extend beyond mere agricultural practices, touching upon social cohesion, resilience, and the preservation of unique cultural identities. By fostering dialogue and embracing adaptation, farmers can navigate these constraints and continue to find common ground, cultivating a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation. Thus, it is through the respectful integration of ancient wisdom with contemporary knowledge that farmers can forge a path towards a resilient, interconnected, and sustainable future for agriculture and the communities it sustains.

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