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Abuyog and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Agricultural Practices and Cultural Beliefs of the Ilimos in Pinukpuk, Kalinga

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Abstract. This ethnographic study examined the agricultural practices, beliefs, and sociocultural significance of Abuyog among the Ilimos community in Limos, Pinukpuk. Indigenous agricultural systems continue to face challenges from modernization, environmental change, and socioeconomic pressures, creating concerns regarding the preservation of traditional knowledge and practices. The study aimed to examine the significance of Abuyog in the agricultural livelihood of the Ilimos community, describe its integration into farming practices, and explore its social implications within the community. The study utilized an ethnographic research design involving ten farmers actively practicing Abuyog. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation of local practices and were analyzed through thematic interpretation to identify recurring themes and cultural meanings. The findings revealed that the Ilimos community consists of experienced farmers aged 46 to 65 years with 22 to 35 years of farming experience, demonstrating extensive indigenous agricultural knowledge transmitted across generations. Participants relied primarily on small-scale agriculture and employed crop diversification and alternative livelihood strategies to address economic limitations and limited rice production. Traditional farming practices were strongly grounded in indigenous ecological knowledge through the use of carabaos, wooden plows, natural soil management methods, and agroforestry practices. Rituals, offerings, prayers, and taboos also remained deeply integrated into agricultural activities. Abuyog further functioned as a cooperative labor system that strengthened family relationships and community solidarity through mutual assistance and shared responsibility. The study concluded that Abuyog remains a culturally embedded and sustainable agricultural system that promotes social cohesion, preserves indigenous knowledge, strengthens cultural continuity, and supports community resilience.

Introduction

Indigenous farming practices in the Cordillera play a crucial role in local livelihoods while also reflecting ecological resilience and cultural continuity. These approaches are gaining recognition in anthropology, rural development, and sustainability research as examples of collaboration and resource management that can address current issues like food insecurity, climate change, and rural poverty. Worldwide, entities such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2018) have stressed the significance of indigenous knowledge systems in attaining sustainable development objectives, underscoring their contribution to biodiversity preservation, climate resilience, and community empowerment. In this context, recording and examining localized practices like Abuyog is both academically important and practically pressing.

Studies on Cordillera agriculture have consistently highlighted the complexity and diversity of farming systems, with rice as the primary crop accompanied by corn and vegetables (Lang-ay et al., 2016). The Ifugao rice terraces are extensively researched as a UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape that combines ecological wisdom, rituals, and collaborative work (Acabado, 2012). In Benguet, the cultivation of vegetables is associated with traditional methods as well as market-focused

advancements (Baguilat, 2015). Throughout these studies, a consistent motif is the incorporation of cultural beliefs, rituals, and collaborative systems into farming practices.

Filipino cooperation has been extensively documented through concepts such as bayanihan and damayan, which reflect solidarity and mutual assistance in agricultural and social contexts (Veneracion, 1996). These practices are embedded in language, ritual, and everyday life, underscoring the cultural value of reciprocity. Comparative studies in Southeast Asia also highlight similar traditions of labor exchange, such as gotong royong in Indonesia, which reinforce community bonds while reducing economic costs (Bowen, 1986). Collectively, these works establish that cooperation and reciprocity are vital to sustaining rural communities.

Across existing research, several patterns emerge. First, indigenous agricultural practices are consistently linked to ecological respect, with rituals and taboos reinforcing sustainable resource use. Second, cooperation is not merely economic but deeply social and spiritual, strengthening community solidarity. Third, reciprocity is valued even when not directly compensated, reflecting a moral economy that prioritizes collective well-being over individual gain (Scott, 1976). These agreements provide a strong foundation for analyzing Abuyog as both a farming system and a cultural institution.

Despite these insights, limitations remain. Many studies focus on generalized concepts of cooperation, such as bayanihan, without examining localized, community-specific practices in depth. Ethnographic detail is often limited, with surveys or secondary data overshadowing lived experiences. Some scholars critique indigenous practices as inefficient or vulnerable to modernization pressures, arguing that mechanization and market integration are necessary for productivity (Biggelaar et al., 1997). Others, however, emphasize their resilience and adaptability, particularly in contexts of resource scarcity. These conflicting perspectives highlight the need for nuanced, community-based ethnographic research that foregrounds indigenous voices.

In this academic realm, the Ilimos' Abuyog system in Pinukpuk, Kalinga, continues to be insufficiently studied. Although bayanihan has been extensively researched, its specific use in local indigenous farming communities has not been thoroughly recorded. This disparity prompts essential inquiries: How does Abuyog enhance agricultural output, cultural identity, and social unity? What insights can be gained for sustainable development and educational integration? Responding to these inquiries has theoretical significance for grasping reciprocity and cooperation, practical relevance for agricultural policy and rural advancement, and cultural importance for safeguarding indigenous heritage.

The relevance of this study is highlighted by ongoing challenges confronting farmers in the Cordillera, such as restricted irrigation, inadequate equipment, and a lack of financial assistance. These limitations jeopardize the sustainability of smallholder agriculture and heighten vulnerability to climate change. Concurrently, national strategies like Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) highlight the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into curricula, fostering opportunities to integrate practices such as Abuyog within educational systems. Documenting Abuyog addresses both urgent agricultural issues and wider policy efforts, making the research essential and pertinent at this time.

This study pursues three focused research questions: What is the significance of Abuyog in the agricultural life of the Ilimos? How is Abuyog integrated into farming practices? What are its social and cultural effects on the community? The primary goals are to examine, document, and analyze the practice of Abuyog. Secondary goals include assessing its potential for sustainable development, exploring its integration into educational programs, and comparing it with other cooperative systems in the Cordillera. hese objectives are focused on actions and correspond with both scholarly and practical inputs.

Methodology

Research Design

This research utilized a descriptive-ethnographic design to investigate the agricultural beliefs and practices related to Abuyog within the Ilimos community in Pinukpuk, Kalinga. The descriptive component sought to collect details about the community's cultural customs, beliefs, and socio-agricultural circumstances, whereas the ethnographic method offered a comprehensive insight into Abuyog as perceived and understood by the participants within their cultural framework

Population

The study was conducted in Limos, Pinukpuk, Kalinga, selected for its rich cultural background and active practice of Abuyog. A total of ten (10) participants were purposively selected based on their knowledge, experience, and active involvement in Abuyog practices. These participants included elders, traditional farmers, and recognized culture bearers in the community.

Participant Code	Name	Age	Gender	Years of Farming Experience
Participant 1	Emerita Bowat	55	Female	35 years
Participant 2	Aida Verdillo	65	Female	30 years
Participant 3	Desing Tayawa	60	Female	25 years
Participant 4	Valentina B. Lopez	63	Female	32 years
Participant 5	Conchita Dangiwan	58	Female	29 years
Participant 6	Timothia L. Gudayon	52	Female	28 years
Participant 7	Pedro Ambona	49	Male	25 years
Participant 8	Maria L. Bangloy	46	Female	22 years
Participant 9	Jose T. Balweg	57	Female	30 years
Participant 10	Lina B. Malannag	50	Female	26 years

Table 1. Distribution of the Participants

Data Gathering Instrument

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observation of participants. An interview guide or questionnaire created by a researcher was used to guarantee that important themes—like agricultural methods, traditions, and bayanihan's role in Abuyog—were uniformly examined among all participants

Data Gathering Procedure

This research followed ethical guidelines, prioritizing participants' rights, cultural awareness, and privacy. Before collecting data, Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) was obtained following the standards set by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

The researcher obtained consent from the Barangay of Limos, Pinukpuk to collect data utilized in the study. Interviews took place in settings chosen by the participants, like their homes or farms, to promote comfort and openness throughout the conversation. Participant observation was utilized to record real practices, interactions, and behaviors regarding Abuyog within the community.

Data Analysis

The information obtained from interviews and observations was examined utilizing thematic analysis. Responses were recorded, structured, and categorized to uncover common patterns and themes connected to collaboration, cultural values, labor sharing, and social connections.

These themes were analyzed to offer a more profound insight into the importance of Abuyog in the farming life of the Ilimos. The examination concentrated on the ways in which cultural values, customs, and personal experiences influence and uphold the practice.

Results and Discussion

The participants are experienced individuals engaged in agricultural practices in Pinukpuk, Kalinga. The ten (10) participants, composed of farmers, elders, and culture bearers, range in age from 46 to 65 years old, indicating that they are mainly middle-aged to elderly individuals who serve as custodians of indigenous knowledge.

In terms of farming experience, they reported 22 to 35 years of agricultural practice, reflecting their deep familiarity with traditional farming systems such as *Abuyog*. The data also suggest a strong relationship between age and farming experience, indicating that agricultural knowledge is acquired through long-term practice and intergenerational transmission.

Table 1. Presents the Demographic Profile of the participants, who are farmers practicing Abuyog and possess extensive farming experience that provides valuable insights into the traditional agricultural practices of the Ilimos community.

Participant Code	Name	Age	Gender	Years of Farming Experience
Participant 1	Emerita Bowat	55	Female	35 years
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Table No. 1. Distribution of the Participants

The findings indicate that the Ilimos community in Pinukpuk is composed of religious, humble, and hardworking individuals whose livelihoods primarily depend on small-scale agriculture. Due to limited rice production, they adopt crop diversification strategies and engage in alternative livelihood activities to sustain their needs.

"Our harvest is not always enough, so we plant other crops and sometimes work outside just to support our family." (Participant 1, Female, 55 years)

This reflects subsistence adaptation strategies, where diversification and labor mobility function as coping mechanisms to address agricultural limitations (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017).

Indigenous Practices in Land Preparation

The residents of Ilimos continue to use indigenous and traditional methods for growing rice. One of the primary techniques involves the use of carabaos in preparing the rice fields. Farmers allow water to remain in the field for about a week to soften the soil and facilitate the decomposition of weeds and leftover rice stalks. After this, the field is repeatedly plowed using *sablot* (wooden plows) until the soil becomes sufficiently loose and free of weeds. As part of the final preparation, long pieces of lumber are used to further break down the soil, making it suitable for transplanting rice seedlings, locally known as *penal*.

In some instances, farmers use three to five carabaos tied in succession to trample the wet field in circular motions. The land is then submerged in water again for another week, after which wooden *sablot* are used to crush remaining weeds and rice residues. These practices reflect a labor-intensive but ecologically grounded approach to soil preparation that relies on natural processes rather than synthetic inputs.

"We let the water stay in the field first so the soil becomes soft, then we plow it many times until it is ready for planting." (Participant 2, Female, 65 years)

This statement illustrates the community's reliance on traditional soil management techniques that enhance soil fertility and prepare optimal conditions for rice cultivation through natural means.

"Sometimes we use many carabaos together to make the work faster, especially when the field is large." (Participant 3, Female, 60 years)

This reflects the integration of cooperative labor and animal-assisted farming, which not only improves efficiency in land preparation but also reinforces collective work practices and shared responsibility within the community. Beyond rice cultivation, farmers follow standardized preparation methods for other crops such as corn, beans, mung beans, garden peas (*kardis*), pechay, banana suckers, and coffee seedlings. This involves careful soil preparation and adherence to an agricultural calendar that guides the appropriate timing and selection of crops based on seasonal conditions.

In coffee cultivation, a protective agroforestry practice is observed, where large trees such as Acacia and Narra are planted to provide shade for coffee plants. This method helps regulate sunlight exposure, creating favorable growing conditions and protecting the crops from excessive heat.

Additionally, the *kaingin* system (*uma*) remains one of the most common farming practices among the Ilimos. Land preparation under this system can take several days to months before the planting season, which typically begins at the onset of the rainy season in June. During summer, the land is cleared and dried to allow vegetation to be burned, with the ash serving as a natural fertilizer for the soil. Once the land is fully prepared, farmers wait for rainfall, after which they call for *Abuyog* to commence planting.

Beliefs in Farming

The community views farming as a critical method of existence as well as a major source of income. They are deeply convinced that if everyone works together, especially when planting and harvesting at the same time, a plentiful crop will be produced. The people closely monitor omens during these agricultural efforts, interpreting them as either positive or negative indicators. Invoking the spirits of their ancestors to preserve their crops from injury and natural disasters is a widespread practice among them. In addition, they pray to God for wisdom and blessings in all of their agricultural pursuits.

"If we work together during planting and harvesting, we will have a better harvest." (Participant 4, Female, 63 years)

This reflects the community's belief in collective effort and shared labor, emphasizing that cooperation is essential for achieving agricultural productivity and food security.

"We pray to God and ask our ancestors to protect our crops from harm." (Participant 5, Female, 58 years)

This highlights the integration of spirituality into farming practices, where both divine guidance and ancestral protection are believed to ensure the safety and success of crops.

Rites and Rituals in Abuyog Farming

In the practice of *Abuyog*, members of the community render mutual assistance in various agricultural tasks. This cooperative system significantly eases and expedites labor, not only in farm cultivation but also in activities such as preparing and excavating elevated areas designated for house construction. As a gesture of gratitude and hospitality, the landowner typically prepares traditional rice cakes (*dekot*) for the workers' refreshment (*meryenda*) and may also butcher a native pig, accompanied by ritual expressions intended to invoke blessings for a successful and fruitful endeavor. Prior to the serving of food, a ritual offering known as *atang* is performed, wherein the food is symbolically offered to the unseen spirits. The invocation commonly associated with this ritual is: "This is for you, unseen spirits; do not harm us as we partake of this food." The performance of *atang* is deeply embedded in local customs and is a standard practice during various communal gatherings and celebrations.

"Before we eat, we offer food to the spirits so they will not harm us." (Participant 6, Female, 52 years)

This statement reflects the practice of *atang* as a form of ritual offering, demonstrating how spiritual beliefs are integrated into communal labor and daily life. It highlights the concept of ritual reciprocity, where offerings are made to maintain harmony between the human and spiritual realms.

"Abuyog is not just work; it is helping each other without expecting payment." (Participant 7, Male, 49 years)

This emphasizes that *Abuyog* functions as a system of mutual aid and social cooperation. It reflects strong social capital within the community, where labor is exchanged based on trust, reciprocity, and collective responsibility rather than monetary compensation.

Beliefs and Rituals in Harvesting

Pre-Harvest Practices

The rice harvesting process in Limos, Pinukpuk, Kalinga is deeply rooted in indigenous beliefs and customs that reflect the community's spiritual worldview. The elders scatter ginger, lemon, or *kalamansi* leaves in the corners of the rice field a day before or during harvest to ward off bad luck and evil spirits. As noted by Participant 3 (Desing Tayawa), unused clothes are burned to produce cleansing smoke (*mampa asok*), while ginger is placed around the field's perimeter for spiritual protection. These practices are supplemented by prayers to deceased ancestors and Kabunian to ensure safety, protection, and a successful harvest.

"We scatter ginger and leaves to keep away bad spirits during harvest." ." (Participant 3, Female, 60 years)

This reflects the community's reliance on traditional ecological knowledge, where natural elements are used as protective mechanisms to maintain spiritual and agricultural balance.

Harvest and Thanksgiving Rituals

At the onset of harvest, thanksgiving rituals are performed to show reverence and gratitude. According to Participant 4 (Valentina B. Lopez), ritual offerings (*atang*) to deceased ancestors are believed to prevent bad luck and negative energies that may affect crop production. The community follows these practices strictly due to strong beliefs that failing to offer *atang* may lead to misfortune, as illustrated by past experiences that are interpreted as consequences of neglecting ancestral offerings.

"We offer food and sometimes butcher animals to thank Kabunian for the harvest." (Participant 8, Female, 46 years)

This highlights the ritualized expression of gratitude through offerings, which reinforces cultural continuity and strengthens spiritual relationships between the community and their deities.
During large harvest gatherings, animals such as pigs are butchered, and specific parts, particularly the first blood, are offered as a sign of thanksgiving and to ensure prosperity, long life, and continued blessings. Prior to communal eating, a portion of the meat is set aside as *atang* to honor the ancestors and prevent spiritual disturbance.

Post-Harvest Practices and Taboos

Various practices are observed after harvesting to maintain spiritual harmony and ensure future productivity.
"Certain foods are avoided, as these are believed to hasten the depletion of stored rice. Such taboos function as cultural mechanisms that regulate consumption and promote resource sustainability within the community". (Participant 9, Female, 57 years)

"We follow these traditions because they were taught by our elders and they guide our farming." (Participant 10, Female, 50 years)

This demonstrates the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer in preserving indigenous agricultural systems, ensuring that cultural practices continue to guide farming behavior across generations.

Sociological Importance of Abuyog

The indigenous practice of *Abuyog* plays a vital sociocultural role in the agricultural and communal life of the people of Ilimos, Pinukpuk. More than just a farming method, *Abuyog* functions as a socio-economic and spiritual framework that sustains both family units and the broader community. This practice fosters cooperation, mutual assistance, and collective responsibility, values deeply embedded in the traditional culture of the Ilimos people.
Within the Family

At the familial level, *Abuyog* nurtures closer and stronger bonds among family members. The shared labor and mutual support involved in agricultural work promote teamwork while also instilling a sense of accountability and responsibility in each individual. The practice encourages the spirit of *bayanihan*, a cultural concept that reflects communal unity and cooperation.

"Working together in the farm makes our family closer." (Participant 1, Female, 55 years)

This statement reflects how collective agricultural labor strengthens family cohesion by fostering emotional closeness, shared responsibility, and unity of purpose. Through *Abuyog*, family members are not only working together physically but also building stronger relational ties rooted in cooperation and shared survival.

The practice also reinforces values of fairness and inclusivity, as each family member—regardless of age or gender—is given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the agricultural work, thereby strengthening the sense of belonging within the family unit.

Within the Community

In the broader community context, *Abuyog* serves as a mechanism for maintaining social cohesion and harmony. It promotes peace and order by reinforcing shared norms, mutual respect, and collective responsibility among community members. Through this cooperative system, individuals ensure that no one is left behind during critical agricultural activities such as planting and harvesting.

"No one is left behind because everyone helps each other." (Participant 6, Female, 52 years)

This highlights the presence of strong social solidarity and mutual support within the community, where cooperation is not only expected but also culturally valued as a shared responsibility.

"Through Abuyog, we feel that we are one community." (Participant 2, Female, 65 years)

This statement reflects the development of a collective identity, where individuals perceive themselves as part of a unified group bound by shared practices, values, and goals. *Abuyog* thus strengthens social cohesion by fostering trust, sincerity, and interconnectedness among community members. Overall, *Abuyog* extends beyond agricultural cooperation and functions as a social institution that strengthens family relationships, builds resilient communities, and sustains the cultural identity of the Ilimos people. Through this practice, labor, values, and traditions are collectively maintained, ensuring both social stability and agricultural sustainability.

The findings reveal that the agricultural system of the Ilimos community in Kalinga integrates ecological knowledge, social cooperation, and spiritual belief systems. This aligns with studies emphasizing that indigenous knowledge systems are adaptive, sustainable, and community-based (Berkes, 2018; Méndez et al., 2017).

The reliance on crop diversification and off-farm work reflects livelihood resilience strategies commonly observed in rural communities (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017). These strategies help mitigate risks associated with limited agricultural production. Traditional land preparation practices demonstrate the application of indigenous ecological knowledge, which enhances soil fertility and sustainability (Berkes, 2018). Similarly, cooperative labor systems such as *Abuyog* strengthen social capital and improve productivity (Pretty et al., 2018).

The integration of spiritual beliefs in agriculture underscores the importance of cultural and symbolic systems in shaping farming practices (Méndez et al., 2017). Rituals and taboos function not only as spiritual practices but also as informal regulatory systems that guide resource use and environmental stewardship. Moreover, the *Abuyog* system reinforces family and community cohesion through shared labor and reciprocity. This reflects broader indigenous frameworks where economic, social, and cultural systems are deeply interconnected (Pretty et al., 2018). Overall, the Ilimos agricultural system represents a holistic and sustainable model that combines ecological adaptation, social cooperation, and cultural continuity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the agricultural practices, beliefs, and sociocultural significance of *Abuyog* among the Ilimos community in Limos, Pinukpuk. The findings reveal that *Abuyog* is not merely a farming technique but a holistic cultural system that integrates traditional ecological knowledge, spiritual beliefs, and cooperative labor. Agricultural practices in the community are deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge, as reflected in land preparation methods, ritual observances, and communal work. These practices highlight the strong relationship between the Ilimos people and their environment, as well as their reliance on cooperation and shared responsibility for agricultural productivity. Furthermore, *Abuyog* plays a crucial role in strengthening family and community relationships, reinforcing values such as unity, mutual support, and collective identity. Its persistence indicates the resilience of indigenous knowledge systems despite pressures of modernization, climate change, and socioeconomic challenges.

The implications of these findings extend across theory, practice, and policy. Theoretically, the study contributes to anthropological debates on reciprocity, moral economy, and indigenous ecological knowledge, challenging modernization narratives that often undervalue traditional systems. Practically, *Abuyog* offers a model of community-based sustainable agriculture that reduces dependence on wage labor, enhances food security, and provides strategies for climate adaptation. Policy-wise, the research underscores the importance of integrating indigenous practices into Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), while also promoting *Abuyog* through community handbooks, agricultural extension programs, and ecotourism initiatives. Recognizing indigenous systems as assets rather than remnants of the past supports inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of preserving indigenous agricultural systems like *Abuyog*, as they contribute not only to cultural continuity but also to sustainable agricultural practices and local food security. By documenting and analyzing *Abuyog*, the research highlights its enduring relevance and offers pathways for embedding indigenous knowledge into contemporary development and education frameworks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to support the preservation, promotion, and integration of the Abuyog agricultural practice. Government agencies, academic institutions, and cultural organizations should collaborate with the Ilimos community to systematically document Abuyog practices, rituals, and oral traditions in

order to preserve indigenous knowledge for future generations and strengthen cultural heritage conservation. Furthermore, the Abuyog system, as a sustainable and community-based practice, should be integrated into local agricultural extension programs and indigenous studies curricula to bridge traditional and modern knowledge systems while encouraging younger generations to appreciate and adopt culturally relevant practices. The unique agricultural heritage of Abuyog may also be promoted through community-based ecotourism initiatives that, when properly managed, can provide alternative livelihood opportunities, increase cultural awareness, and contribute to local economic development while safeguarding indigenous traditions. Additionally, future studies should investigate the comparative effectiveness of Abuyog in relation to modern farming systems, particularly its environmental, social, and economic impacts. Expanding research to other indigenous communities within the Cordillera region may also provide insights into the similarities and differences in indigenous agricultural knowledge systems. Lastly, the development of a community-based manual on Abuyog farming is recommended. This practical and culturally sensitive guide can document traditional farming methods and serve as a valuable resource for local farmers, agricultural educators, and non-government organizations promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

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Competing Interests Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest. The research was carried out impartially, and there are no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could have influenced the findings or interpretations presented in this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study consist of ethnographic field notes, interviews, and community observations. Due to the sensitive cultural nature of the information and the need to respect the privacy of participants, the raw data are not publicly available. Summarized or anonymized data may be provided by the author upon reasonable request, subject to community consent and ethical considerations.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.