

Email Interview with Dr. Bacdayan

Dr. Albert S. Bacdayan is the author of the Article 'Mountain Irrigators in the Philippines', the main article on the topic that my research paper is focused on. The interview was conducted in October, 2011.

Dear Dr. Bacdayan,

I thank you so very much for the email, and I greatly appreciate your willingness to help me with my project! I am very excited to find out more information from you as you probably have the vastest understanding regarding the Bwasao Irrigation System.

In your reply, you wrote that there is 'an urgency as never before' to find a solution to the Bwasao irrigation, and I wanted to find more detail about the changes that took place in the community and around it that changed the availability of the water.

(Questions are presented before each answer).

"Dear Einav,

Below are my responses to the questions you sent. It would be a good idea to have the questions at hand while reading my responses. If you have questions, please let me know. I advise going to the Internet as indicated below to learn about larger socio-political context, including relevant statistics, of Tanulong."

1. **Q:** What was the size of the tribe at the time the ditch was built, and how many tribe members were using it then, as oppose to the size of the community, and number of tribe member that use it currently? Estimates will also be great.

A: *"At the time of construction of the ditch commence circa 1954, the population of the tribe was estimated to be 1000. This was an educated rough estimate. (Please google Philippine Census to find documented figures. Tanulong is in the municipality of Sagada, Mountain Province, which is a part of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). Let us discuss what you find."*

2. **Q:** Does the Bwasao irrigation system functions now as it did in the beginning? If yes- how did they maintain to keep it that way?
- If not- what changed? Was the ditch expended to accommodate more people? Was the availability of the water changed (for example- was there any changes up the stream that reduce water availability, such as dams and other irrigation projects)? If you know the amounts-how much water did the system supply in 1972 and how much does it supply now?

A: *"None. The big change is downstream. The Agawa people or tribe constructed a dam to impound the overflow from the Tanulong dam to supply the population of their municipal center and environs, Kin-iway, Besao municipality. (Municipality is roughly equivalent to county.) To make sure that the Agawas will have water, the Tanulong people and they had an agreement specifying how much water from the Tanulong dam can go to Tanulong."*

3. **Q:** Has the decision making context regarding the water changed for different actors (for example- has the purpose of the water changed or expended? As I understood, the water used to be only for irrigation and now it is used also for residential consumption, right? Is there any other function for the water besides those two?

- Do all the members feel the shortage? Do they try to conserve the resource or are they facing 'the tragedy of the commons'?

A: *"Not yet, but that is the issue now. The traditional springs near the villages have been less and less able to supply potable water to the households and so the thought of using Bwasao water has been gaining ground. The need is the result of population increase, higher demand for quality fresh water. So since the beginning of Bwasao there has been realization of water shortage for household use."*

4. **Q:** Does cultural traditions stayed the same in this region or changed with time- i.e. does the tribe still collectively act and believe in corporation of all the tribe members for the benefits of the whole as happened at the initial Bwasao construction? If not, what has changed and why?

A: *"Cultural tradition is still intact, though not as powerful as before due to exposure to outside influences such as the public schools, the work of Christian missionaries and migration to other places. But the feeling of collective action is still strong, however (see #5 following)."*

5. **Q:** Was there any interaction or introduction to the outside world or an outside system that jeopardize the ability of the community to act collectively, and/or jeopardize their traditional way of living?

A: *"Collective action though still highly valued has been breaking down especially in regard to maintaining the Bwasao irrigation system. Among the reasons is migration to other places in search for better opportunities. Potential leaders, though still very loyal and supportive do not reside in the home villages. They are among those who embraced the challenge of better opportunities. Because of this, they are not at home to rally the people. Those left at home are also seemingly getting overburdened maintaining the ditches especially in January and February when the dam and the ditch need to be repaired."*

The weakening of the spirit of collective action in respect to the dam has also been an unintended effect of government aid. Over the years it has been possible to obtain aid from the government for local improvement projects. The Tanulong village (barangay) officials have had grants from such agencies as the National Irrigation Authority or NIA and so people have become used to being paid for working on projects benefiting themselves. This has sapped volunteerism and it is not hard to see how reluctance to work free for the maintenance of the irrigation system is the result."

6. **Q:** Is there any other community or other parties that also have rights for the water, or use the water (without rights) besides the Tanulong people? And if so, how did they get the rights or how they are able to use it? (Inter-village conflicts?)

A: *"At this time, none. But that is the problem now because an outside group that is so hard-up for water is working on, rather tempting, the Tanulong people to share the water with them. If and when that happens, the situation asked and discussed in # 7 would develop."*

7. **Q:** Are there any new institutions within and/or outside of the community that emerged after the construction of the Bwasao, and that have a say regarding the water use (besides the CSVCF)?

A: *“Some 4 to 5 km south of Tanulong territory is the seat of the municipality of Sagada. Also called Sagada, the center and its environs are in dire need of household water. Population increase, higher standard of living and the fact that Sagada has developed to be a foreign and domestic tourist destination are to blame.*

It appears that in late 2010, the Sagada municipal mayor was able to obtain a grant, or a promise of one, from a senator in Manila for a Sagada town municipal waterworks. Lacking a credible source, he thought of the Bwasao source and sought to entice the Tanulong people to share the water with the town center and environs in return for vast improvements of the ditch (canal) channeling the water from the source to the Tanulong rice fields. The implication is that the Tanulong people will no longer bear the responsibility of maintaining the ditch. It would also be a source of employment while the project lasts. Most importantly, the Tanulong rice fields will have water for the rice growing season (December to June) which is what their water right grant from the government is all about. In return, the municipal center and environs, as well as the Tanulong villages, will use the water during the off season for household use.”

“This is a very tempting situation, but it will mean the loss of autonomy in terms of control and a sense of ownership by the Tanulong people because an outside authority, the municipal government, will have a say as regards the water. The tribe is stressed and divided: some, especially the officials, are in favor and some against. There is an alternative.

Coincidentally, my brother, Andrew, and I, had for years been talking about a more efficient use of the precious water to include household use of it in the Tanulong villages and their immediate neighbor, Bangngaang, and also the municipal center, Sagada. We have long recognized the growing need for household water in the area and the burdensome annual repair work borne by the people to keep the irrigation works going. Shortly after retirement, therefore, Andrew established the Cordillera Social Venture Foundation that you are familiar with to be the vehicle for achieving these goals of household use and sharing it with other groups. But being of Tanulong descent, we are interested in seeing to it that these goals be achieved according to the terms of the Tanulong people as owners of the water by dint of the hard work and sacrifices of their elders and of their prior use of it sanctioned by their water right.

We think a Tanulong Tribe Water Cooperative is the best way to achieve these goals. This way control that is undiluted by outside authority will be vested in the tribe.

You asked why I mentioned in my e-mail that the issue of control is important now as never before. What has just been said is the answer. For the first time in so long, control of the water or loss of such control to an outside structure is hanging in the balance. This is not saying that there had been no previous efforts to wrest control and ownership of the water for there had been such initiatives before as covered in the article you read that brought Bwasao to your attention. But that is long satisfactorily settled.”