

GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

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(ABSTRACT)

Local communities are equipped with knowledge systems that have enabled them to survive for generations, as well as form the foundation for the social, economic, political and spiritual conditions of their cultures and identity as peoples.

This paper will discuss framework of local knowledge and the concept of global responsibility according to the cultural perspectives of the local Talaandig people of Bukidnon, Mindanao Island, Philippines.

In the Talaandig community, knowledge is explained through the framework and structures of the earth, the human body, and the family, the community or tribe. These structures are called "Agpangan". Knowledge defined through the Agpangan can be expanded horizontally or vertically from a simple to a complex idea or situation.

I present the idea that local communities bear the responsibility to explain the significance of their unique cultures in a similar manner to which global science explained itself to the common mind. I argue that the link between local knowledge and global science is common sense, and show how common sense enables the Talaandig community to account its responsibility to the family, the community, and the world.

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INTRODUCTION

The Talaandig tribe is one of the 110 groups of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. It has a population of approximately 100,000 people and mostly concentrated in the northern and western part of the province of Bukidnon, Mindanao Island, Philippines. Its territory is marked by Mt. Kitanglad ranges with its highest peak of 2,938 meters above seal level found in Dulangdulang Mountain. According to the Talaandig oral history, a great flood that happened thousands of years ago did not submerge the peak of Dulangdulang. During the flood, taking refuge at the top of Mt.Dulangdulang saved Apu Agbibilin, the ancestor of the Talaandig people.

The local knowledge of the Talaandig people was derived from oral history and traditions. These traditions enabled the Talaandig to survive for generations despite the overwhelming pressures of colonization that existed until today. Different types of religious rituals, dances, songs and music, epic traditions, folktales, games, handicrafts, customary mediation remained a part of the everyday life of the Talaandigs.

The most significant aspect of the local knowledge of the Talaandig people is the story of creation that defined the framework and structure of the Creator's Master Plan. The Talaandig story of creation explains the origin and source of knowledge and the principle of balance that provides the framework for peace, justice and harmony on earth. Through this story, the Talaandig people were able to define their role as custodian of creation.

OBJECTIVES

For the purpose of this presentation, the writer specifically aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To discuss the origin of local knowledge based on the Talaandig story of creation.
2. To explain the concept of a global responsibility based on the framework and structures of local knowledge.
3. To discuss the significance of the common sense as basis of identifying the link between local knowledge and global science.

ORIGIN OF THE TALAANDIG KNOWLEDGE

The Talaandig story of creation known as *Gugud* tells that in the beginning, there was no heaven or earth. There was nothing but a rainbow-like structure called "*Bubulusan Balugtu*", meaning, "the sitting place of the rainbow". It is otherwise known as the "*Banting*", meaning,

“a balance”. The structure is held by a winged-God called *Agtayabun Migbaya* or *Luwit ha Namintedan*, “the pure white God” who is also known as *Diwata Makabugnaw*, “the God of Peace”. *Agtayabun Migbaya* is known as Lord of the Guardians called *Tumanud* and Spirit Teachers called *Mulin-ulin*.

Inside the *Banting* are two other Gods. One is known as *Mulug Nanguyaw-uyaw*, meaning, “The Great Planner”. He is also known as *Takinan hu Migbaya* or *Gundu hu Namintedan*, “the Lord of the Decision Maker”. He is a one-headed God and referred to as *Magbabaya*, the Decision-Maker and God of Creation. *Mulug Nanguyaw-uyaw* sits inside the *Banting*. Opposite him is a ten-headed god known as *Nangulibet ha Suguy* or *Lalawen ha Diwata*, meaning, “The Forbidden God”. He is also known as *Takinan hu Lumendeb* or *Gundu hu Talabusaw*, “the Lord of the Warriors”.

The concept of “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong” originated from the inherent relationships of *Mulug Nanguyaw-uyaw* and *Nangulibet ha Suguy*. These two gods provide the framework of the Talaandig concept, idea, philosophy, principles and practice of equality and justice. By understanding the relationships of the two gods, the mediators of the Talaandig tribe are able to resolve conflicts that occur in the community.

Based on the Talaandig story of creation, knowledge is supplied by a Spirit Teacher called *Mulin-ulin*. The Talaandig people secure guidance from the *Mulin-ulin* either directly, when the person is spiritually prepared or by means of a dream when the mind is resting and free from interruptions. As a preparation for the intervention of the *Mulin-ulin*, a ritual known as *Paulin* or *Panumanud* is performed to a member of the Talaandig community who needs spiritual guidance in relation with social, economic, political and spiritual responsibility.

THE FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The Talaandig framework of knowledge is known as “*Agpangan*” (a frame or design). *Agpangan* serves as the basis or model of elaborating a particular concept or idea. Like a mathematical formula, *Agpangan* enables the Talaandig person to provide an appropriate and just solution to a given conflict or problem.

Based on the principle of the *Agpangan*, everything that exists through nature serves as model of local knowledge. These models serve as guide for human actions and interventions. Through the concept of the *Agpangan*, human thinking is stimulated towards the evaluation and assessment of the theoretical and practical conditions of human existence.

The structure and elements of the human body, structure of the family, the house, the community and the whole earth, illustrate the framework of local knowledge among the Talaandig people. The integrity of the elements of the Talaandig culture also provides framework of the Talaandig knowledge systems.

The *Agpangan* as the basis of the local knowledge of the Talaandig people begins with concepts, ideas, a philosophies and principles. Through the senses, i.e., hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, touching and tasting, the principles and theory about local knowledge

becomes a fact or reality. For example, the concept of a mountain remains a concept, an idea, a philosophy or a principle unless it is heard by the ears, seen by the eyes, touched by the hands, felt by the heart, smelt by the nose or tasted by the tongue. When the concept or idea has passed through the verification of the senses, such knowledge could no longer be denied. It becomes a truth and a reality. The processing of local knowledge through the senses is a system and a process that demonstrated local knowledge as a form of science by itself.

Figure I. Framework and Structure of Local Knowledge.

HUMAN BODY	HOUSE	FAMILY	COMMUNITY	CULTURE	EARTH
Flesh	Kitchen, cooking place	Mothers	Farm Area and Places	Territory /Domain	Land
Blood	Bamboo tubes / water jars	Young Women/ Elder Women	Fishing and washing area	Health and Family	Waters and rivers
Bones, Veins and Stomach	Fireplace	Women and Men	Crops, Hunting games, granaries	Economy	Plants, trees, wildlife/ Forest
Legs and Feet	Pillars/ Door Ladder	Young Men Male Children	Warriors and Messengers	Defense Force Security	Air
Eyes	Window	Elder/Elders Parents	Blacksmith/ Artisans	Leadership/ Fire/Energy	Sun
Mouth	Receiving Hall	Old Folks and children	Oral History, Chants, Folk Narratives	Language	Sound
Head/ Brain/ Heart	Roofing, the Walls	Old Folks / Elders	Spirituality /Shamanism	Beliefs System Sensitivity	Spirits

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Local knowledge of the Talaandig people is *unwritten* and expressed and transmitted through *oral* traditions. The community also communally and collectively owns it. Local knowledge is deeply associated with *nature*. It is *practical* and *dynamic* in form and substance. It goes with change and, therefore, provides an appropriate response to the present situation. The practical knowledge about land, water, food, animals, air sun and sounds, for example, do not need to be written. Hunger, cold, walking, talking, sleeping, smelling, feeling, seeing, hearing, thinking or remembering does not need to be written. These are simple and practical exercises of the human *senses*.

The local knowledge of the Talaandig people is guided by the nature of time, places, conditions and events; nature of the forests, the rivers and the seas and follows the direction and movement of the wind, the sun, the stars and the animals. Local knowledge enables the Talaandig individual to respond to heat, cold, joy or sadness.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Local Knowledge is unwritten. It is known through the oral traditions.
2. Local knowledge is communally and collectively owned.
3. It is closely associated with the elements of nature.
4. It is universal in principle.
5. Local knowledge dynamic and systematic.
6. It is simple and understood through the common sense.
7. It is considered as a common heritage of humanity.

FORMS AND EXPRESSIONS OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Oral history known as *Gugud* is supplemented by reference stories that were either witnessed or experienced by the members of the Talaandig community. A story based on an eye witness account among the Talaandig people is known as *Tanud*, meaning, “seen” while a story that is usually referred to as a conclusion of a situation or event is called *Batbat*, meaning, “to relate”.

Gugud, *Tanud* and *Batbat* are usually narrated when serious matters affecting the social, economic, political and spiritual conditions of the Talaandig community are being discussed. During farming season, for example, the experiences of farmers about success or failure in farming are narrated in the form of *Batbat* or *Gugud*. When the security of the community is at stake, the *Batbat* or *Gugud* focuses on the experiences of the ancestors pertaining to security and defense against war. When settling disputes, the *Batbat* or *Tanud* are usually narrated as references of the resolution of cases.

Local Knowledge of the indigenous Talaandig people are also disseminated in form of entertainment such as storytelling, epic chanting, music and instruments playing. The inputs of the elders who specialize this form of knowledge discuss about the appropriate manner and skills in telling stories, chanting, creating music or choosing the best materials in making the indigenous instruments. Storytellers, chanters and indigenous musician always impart the moral values and aspects of this form of knowledge.

Local stories with indigenous characters in the Talaandig community are called ‘*Nanangen*’; Epics that are chanted by the Talaandig people is called *Ulagin*. Historical and philosophical songs are called ‘*Sala*’; Love songs are called *Idangdang* and particular songs are called *Limbay*. Common musical instruments in the Talaandig community are *Katyapi*, a two-string guitar with a big lizard-shape body; *Dayuday*, a single-string violin with body made of coconut shell and a handle made of small round bamboo; *Pulala*, a long native flute; *Tumpuy*, a short flute; *Kebing*, a jaws harp made of bamboo; *Tambul*, a wooden drum covered with deer skin; *Takembe*, a bamboo instrument with string carved from its skin and used to drive away pests; *Saliyaw* (bells) and *Agung* (agung) are also part of indigenous Talaandig instruments. Other form of entertainment that are used as instruments in disseminating local knowledge includes dancing and indigenous sports competition. The famous dance of the Talaandig people is the *Dugsu*, a ceremonial dance performed during *Kaliga*, a religious

ceremony. The *Binanug*, a hawk dance is usually performed during marriage ceremony; *Saut*, a war dance, is usually performed by warriors as an exercise and a form of art.

Through the performances of religious ceremonies during planting, harvesting and thanksgiving, worshipping in sacred sites and performing annual community rituals, the Talaandig people are able to impart the sacred forms of local knowledge. The participation of the community in these forms of knowledge is sustained through the preparation and sharing of food that is provided as offering to the spirits and the gods. In the Talaandig community, “*Kaliga*”, a healing and thanksgiving ceremony, “*Panalabugta*” and “*Pangibabasuk*”, rituals for opening a farm and planting; “*Pangampu*”, a community ritual; “*Panagulambung*”, a religious ceremony to confer a higher position or status of community leadership; and, *Panendan*, an annual worship in sacred sites are few examples of disseminating local knowledge in their sacred forms among the people.

PRINCIPLES OF THE EXPANSION OF KNOWLEDGE

According to the Talaandig principle of knowledge, a concept or idea can be expanded horizontally or vertically from a simple to a complex idea or situation. The expansion of knowledge on a horizontal approach is based on the principle of the *Timbangan*, the concept of balance that defines the positive and the negative aspect of creation. Based on the principle of balance, knowledge can be expanded equally in two opposite directions. For example, the concept of a person, which could be male or female, can be expanded horizontally as brothers or sisters, male or female cousins, male or female relatives and in-laws.

The vertical expansion of knowledge, on the other hand, is based on the principle of the *Gantangan*, a measuring box. Through the principle of the *Gantangan*, a concept can be increased or decreased according to height or content on a progressive vertical direction. For example, a person can be shorter or taller, younger or older; water can be shallower or deeper; a cliff can be higher or lower.

The concept of the *Timbangan* and *Gantangan* enables the Talaandig to acquire a deeper and broader understanding of things, event or situation. In a conflict resolution, the tribe is able to determine the appropriate measurement of penalties by accounting the vertical and horizontal levels of the offense. Through the *Gantangan* and *Timbangan*, the Talaandig is able to determine whether the social, economic, political, spiritual and environmental condition of the tribe is making any progress or not horizontally or vertically

SIGNIFICANCE OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Local knowledge is simple and practical. It links the survival of every human being to the wholeness of nature and its elements that support life. Local knowledge provides the concrete situations of communities in relation with the environment and provides practical solutions to the problems of the people.

Local knowledge defines a worldview of people and provides direction for their survival socially, economically, politically and spiritually. Local knowledge explains the evolution of

cultural behaviors that resulted from the efforts of people to adjust to their environment. In cases where the people have failed to resolve particular problems, the same became an opportunity for them to gain deeper understanding of the human situations.

The key significance of local knowledge is the development of peoples' capability to understand the world in a very simple manner as understanding the human self. The fact that people has survived for generations since the beginning of time, is a simple reason why local knowledge cannot be simply undermined. Local knowledge deals with simple but applied education, economics, politics, religion, sciences and technologies of indigenous societies. This knowledge is basic but provide a rich ground for the development of the modern society.

Finally, the significance of local knowledge is sustainability based on the holistic understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature. The concept of sustainability in this context offers solution to the environmental problems confronting the world today. Based on the framework and structure of the common sense which is the significant tool of the indigenous peoples towards survival, environmental conservation and sustainability does not need to be expensive. As a matter of fact, the recognition and support to local knowledge and cultures can make environmental conservation more meaningful, efficient and effective.

GLOBAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ASSESSMENT

The idea of an assessment or evaluation as a measure to protect and promote the survival of the Talaandig culture and identity is provided through the concept of the *Timbangan* (a balance scale) and the *Gantangan* (a measuring box). The concept of the *Timbangan* provides the idea of balance on a horizontal situation while the concept of the *Gantangan* provides the idea of measurement on a vertical situation. Through the concept of the *Gantangan* and *Timbangan*, the Talaandig people is able to determine the positive and negative changes that occur in the course of time as well as the progress or failure of every human action.

The concept of balance enables the Talaandig person to determine the conflict that resulted from the interaction of the positive and negative forces in the environment. Through the concept of balance the Talaandig is able to achieve peace and harmony or resolve particular conflicts whenever they exist.

The concept of the measuring box ("*Gantangan*") on the other hand, enabled the Talaandig to determine the standard of exactness. A standard of measurement is necessary in order to manage and control time, space and resources. This means that a person gets what is just enough for what he or she needs in a particular time or place. Through the concept of the *Gantangan*, a standard of equality and fairness is provided among the members of the Talaandig community.

The local knowledge of the Talaandig people provides a system of assessment that promotes the preservation of indigenous cultures and the environment. The concept of assessment is defined through the comprehensive analysis of the relationships between the social, economic, political and spiritual elements of culture and the material or physical elements of nature. The

assessment system of local knowledge is determined through the accounting of the elements that constituted the integrity of nature as well as the elements that constituted the integrity of indigenous human culture. The assessment of local knowledge requires full awareness of the cultural self in relation with the elements of nature that supports human survival.

The analysis of the relationships between indigenous cultures and nature has identified three levels of local knowledge assessment. The first level involves the assessment of the knowledge and awareness of the material constitution of the body in relation with the elements of nature. As stipulated in the Talaandig story of creation, the earth became the flesh of the human body; the water became the blood; the tree and the vine became the bone and the vein; the grass became the hair; the air became the breath and the force; the sun became the sight and heat of the body; the sound of creation became the language and the voice; and, the spirits of creation became the conscience and soul. This means that adverse conditions of nature have corresponding impact into the physical self of the Talaandig being.

The second level of local knowledge assessment involves the cultural relationships of the individual person, the family and the community to the resources of creation. These cultural relationships involve the worship areas of the tribe, the natural learning centers, areas of governance, the natural pharmacy, market place and natural shelter areas that defined constituted the social, economic, political and spiritual existence of the Talaandig in the world.

The third level of the assessment involves the integrity of the cultural territory of the Talaandig. This level of assessment defines the relationship between the indigenous cultural territory and the outside world. Through this level of assessment, the impact of outside cultures into the territory of the Talaandig such as religions, education, governments, economics, defense, are identified.

The accountability of the Talaandig people to the world particularly to the environment and nature that nurture the physical and cultural aspects of human survival is defined in the story of creation. Based on the concept of territorial integrity, the human body, the family and the community are identified as extension of nature and the whole earth. This means that human survival depends on the capability of creation to sustain itself. Therefore, if a human being needs to survive in this world, then he or she must be an efficient caretaker of creation. This also means that a human being must know how to assess and evaluate the physical and cultural conditions of the environment.

The basic tool for the assessment of the existing conditions of culture and environment is common sense. Common sense involves the brain and the senses such as hearing, seeing, smelling, feeling, tasting, touching and moving. According to the Talaandigs, an individual possess a common sense when he or she knows how to think, hear, see, speak, taste, smell, touch, feel and move properly in a given time, space and event. Accounting the social, economic, political and spiritual concepts, ideas, philosophies and principles that are verifiable through the human senses, does the idea of assessment using the common sense.

The use of common sense as a tool of assessment follows a system, logic and procedures that define the theory and practice of local knowledge. Under the common sense principle, the

idea is rationalized or argued upon to develop the philosophy that becomes a principle or theory. In order to prove the theory of knowledge, it must be fully verified by the senses. Hence, knowledge becomes a true knowledge only when it is heard by the ears, seen by the eyes, smelt by the nose, touched by the hands, tasted by the tongue, and felt by the heart. Through constant association with the human senses, the theory of knowledge becomes a practice.

COMMON SENSE AS LINK BETWEEN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND GLOBAL SCIENCE

The close attachment of local knowledge to nature has enabled local cultures to survive for generations amidst pressures of change. The initiatives of the local peoples to respond to the present conditions of the environment provide the dynamic characteristics of the local cultures.

The remarkable difference between local cultures and modern science is that the environment and nature shape the development of the former. In modern science, change occurs through human intervention and experimentation. Modern science produces man-made technologies that are largely dependent on human action while local knowledge depends on the natural conditions of the environment.

The common misconception about local, indigenous or traditional knowledge is that it is unscientific, backward and opposes change or development in the modern world. The worst misconception about local knowledge is that it is being associated with poverty. All of these concepts are entirely wrong because even modern science has practically evolved and depended much on the existence of local knowledge. In fact, the first teacher, engineer or scientist did not undergo any formal training or education that characterizes knowledge in the modern world. Local knowledge is rich. Unfortunately, human manipulation and exploitation destroyed the riches of creation. Thus, the riches of local knowledge were also destroyed.

Like modern science, local knowledge observes a system that involves the theory and practice of learning. Local knowledge begins with concept that develops into ideas, philosophies and principles that are evaluated and verified scientifically. The final form of local knowledge is not simply a product a scientific investigation but a reality based on the actual experiences of the people.

The link between local knowledge and modern science is common sense. The Talaandig learning system involves the brain and the senses. Learning begins with a concept that develops into an idea and philosophy based on affirmative and negative arguments. When the philosophy of a particular idea has been achieved, the result becomes a principle or theory. The theory or principle, however, remains a theory until it is verified by the human senses.

Like modern science, the Talaandig knowledge system strictly follows reason and logic. For example, a Talaandig idea can never go ahead of a concept because without a concept, an idea will never exist. Moreover, the Talaandig philosophy is developed through the argumentation of contrasting ideas. A philosophy can never exist as a single thought. The resolution of

contrasting ideas finally become a principle or theory that serves as basis of field investigation or verification of a particular knowledge.

Modern science cannot solely exist with complicated machines. Complicated machines are guided by the human conscience. Modern science cannot isolate itself from the framework and structure of local knowledge that includes concept, ideas, philosophies and principles that are similarly employed in scientific procedures. Moreover, the verification of practical realities through the senses of hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, feeling and moving are also inevitable to the global scientific understanding. Unlike local knowledge, however, that can sustain itself with the inexpensive conditions of nature, the survival of modern science largely depend on highly complicated and expensive machines. In the absence of complicated machines, however, modern science can still survive, like the local knowledge, on the basis of the human conscience. Thus, common sense evidently serves as the inevitable link between local knowledge and the global science.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Local knowledge is embedded on the face of the earth. Indigenous learning is stimulated by the framework of creation and developed through the principle of balance that provide the infinite expansion of knowledge about the positive and negative realities of things in the world. The accountability of local knowledge to nature and the environment is based on the concept of the earth as the ultimate source of human existence.

The cooperation between local knowledge and global science is necessary towards conservation and protection of the environment. To enable the local communities to actively participate into the assessment, evaluation and conservation of the environment, the acceptance of local knowledge in the modern world is necessary. Moreover, intervention and support towards the empowerment of local knowledge is also needed to enable the local people to assume their responsibility as custodian of creation.

The link between local knowledge and global science is common sense. The common sense structure provides a simple but systematic process necessary for the assessment and evaluation of the existing condition of the environment. The cooperation between local people and modern scientists in solving the environmental and biological crises in the world is not impossible because common sense offers a venue of understanding between the simple and complex thinking of humanity.

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This paper is presented by Datu Migketay Victorino L. Saway, Director and Founder of the Talaandig School For Living Traditions during the Bridging Scales and Epistemologies in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Conference held in Bibliotheca, Alexandria, Egypt from March 17-20, 2004. Datu Migketay is a practitioner of the living traditions of the Talaandig People as an oralist, a mediator, chanter and a ritualist.