

# A SOCIOECONOMIC CALENDAR IN ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORTING AND SOCIAL PLANNING

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## I. Introduction

It is usual for fieldworkers to devise tools or ways and means to obtain the utmost data possible and to arrange them for use. This paper is one of them and has two aims: (a) to introduce a dimensional awareness in field observation techniques employed in ethnographic work; and (b) to show how a socioeconomic calendar can be of some utility in social planning and programming. A socioeconomic calendar is an instrument for ordering cultural data according to the common Gregorian calendar and calibrating them with natural phenomena. I have not seen this utilized in ethnographic work, so this is the motivation for this short paper.

Three stages are contemplated: the first is attainable on an empirical basis, while the ethnographer is making observations and gathering data in particular communities or ethnic groups. The second is an abstraction and generalization stage on an ethnic, regional and national scale; and the third, an application by the social scientist and planner.

## II. The Socioeconomic Calendar

Perhaps every ethnographer is aware, more or less, that the ethnic group he is studying has a calendar of its own which he may study as an item of culture antecedent perhaps to the Gregorian calendar; that certain activities occur with a certain regularity and others with irregularity. This fact can be observed only when the fieldworker stays for a couple of years, or more advantageously, for a longer period of time, a fact that is likely to escape a schedule type of gathering data.

Such kind of native calendar was discovered by the late Prof. H. Otley Beyer among the Ifugao and it was a perfect calendar consisting of thirteen months. What is needed in this kind of work, however, is the recording of the different activities of the people (social, economic, religious, and so on) and calibrating them with the native and modern calendar; or an effort at total description of

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all the activities taking place during the annual cycle and translating them into seasons or shorter work-periods, such as preparing the terraces, planting, weeding, harvesting, etc., and noting down all related rites or rituals, games, preoccupations, etc.

It is perhaps possible to determine which are the fat and lean months. In subsistence economies, the lean period is a critical one and the fat one may mean celebrations, feasts, etc. I recall from my boyhood years in Nueva Ecija that it was during the months prior to the planting season that moneylenders enjoyed profitable business. Unless the research project is a problem-oriented piece of work, such data do not appear in ethnographic studies; hence, these become less useful to social scientists and planners.

Here is another example. During fieldwork in central Mindanao among the Manuvu', for the reason that I could not conduct my study except during the dry months of April and May for the first three trips due to teaching assignments during semesters, no observation of marriages taking place was made. This was the period of planting and weeding and were the lean months. It never occurred to me to relate that condition to marriage until I re-scheduled my trips to other periods of the calendar year and discovered that marriages were celebrated after harvest time. Only then did I relate marriage to the fat months and a generalization was possible. In Manuvu' culture, the accumulation of wealth (articles, goods, animals, etc.) which constitutes the bridewealth could best be achieved after harvest, besides, of course, the expenses that go with the actual marriage feast.

The calendar also attempts to calibrate cultural with natural phenomena. Does the region suffer from strong winds, heavy rain, floods, drought, and so on during certain periods of the year? What is the frequency and regularity of such events and how do they affect the lives of people? How soon can people affected receive aid from their neighbors, or the government? Such information may be necessary especially with nonliterate groups who may have no way of communicating tragedies to the outside, to agencies, and so on.

### III. Application in Social Planning and Programming

There are available in the country today a variety of maps that can be of much use to social scientists in constructing a socio-economic calendar such as climate, typhoon, temperature, population, industry, forest, fishing, mining soil, occupational maps, etc.

But I have yet to see social scientists make use of these data in relation to the society and culture of the people, region, welfare activities, medical care, educational problems, and all sorts of other problems.

Many years ago, leaders in the educational field attempted to change the opening of the school year throughout the country. One of the reasons for this change was to enable school children to help their parents in economic activities, especially those related to rice production. The high government officials, however, did not realize that there are different planting seasons in the country. While the plan was most applicable to Central Luzon, the change would not be of much benefit to some mountain peoples of Northern Luzon for the simple reason that their economic calendar was different. The Ifugao, for example, start the planting season around the first months of the year and the harvesting season about July. Pagan people of Mindanao have almost the same calendar of agricultural activities.

To be of some utility, the results of data gathered by field-workers should affect and mould policies arrived at by social planners and high government officials. There seems to be a widening gap between the data gatherer and the policy formulators. For example, let us take the collection of taxes. Why can the periods set for the collection of taxes not be varied in different parts of the country in view of the diversity of sources of income, lean and fat periods during the annual cycle, or school needs of children? Or is the imposition of income tax on minority peoples wise or advisable for the reason that it offers opportunities for literate Christians to impoverish the people? In some respects, enforcement of the law without knowledge of the economic conditions can bring benefits and advantages to some people and distress to others.

In implementing the rural service program of the government, a socioeconomic calendar might also be of some use. What qualifications should the rural worker have with respect to the community being served? What are the needs of the areas to be serviced and what time of the year are such services most needed? These are but a few points on which concrete information is needed. And why call it rural service, a term which shows bias? There may be groups of people, not necessarily in rural areas, but in nooks and corners or mountain sides of provinces who may need the service more than any Christian group. In other words, send the rural workers where they can most serve the needy.

If there is going to be some good justification for the continuance of rural service, it should be in the training of some of these people in gathering data for the government agencies. Since these government employees have different kinds of education, training, skills and expertise, the government should be able to tap such knowledge in collecting data on social, economic, health, and educational conditions obtaining in their rural assignments. Such data can be informative and should arouse real interest in the welfare of the people, for then the government can send other observers and workers to verify conditions before remedial measures are applied. I would like to believe that a socioeconomic calendar can be of much use in identifying problems and offering help.

#### IV. Some Final Words

What are primarily needed are all sorts of data on the local or ethnic level; and second, for some center to organize these data into regional patterns from which to draw the national configurations. Feeding the data to different governmental agencies and centers can then be done on a more rational basis than now obtains.

It can be roughly seen that the socioeconomic calendar is a tool for ordering data so as to enable social scientists to interpret sociofacts more roundly and relevantly. This is done by relating all social and cultural data to nonhuman phenomena which may affect the lives of people. The moment these latter phenomena are identified as having some kind of regularity, sequence, or permanence, they can be associated with the behavior (customs, practices, beliefs, values, etc.) of man and therefore such overall view of attendant conditions can have meaning in the making of laws, rules and regulations, in the formulation of policies, and in the carrying out of programs of welfare work.