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# Keeping the Tradition Alive: The Socio-Cultural Influences, Work Practices, Production Processes, and Livelihood Experiences of Balut Makers and Vendors

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## Abstract

*Balut* making and vending remained as important traditional livelihood that contributes to the cultural identity and local economy of many Filipino communities. This study analyzed the socio-cultural influences, work practices, production processes, livelihood experiences and challenges and opportunities faced by balut makers and vendors in the Municipality of Dao. This aimed to understand the sustained practices of balut making and vending, balancing both the economic and cultural aspects of the practices. A qualitative-phenomenological research design guided by the constructivist methodological perspective was employed. The participants were the 15 balut makers and vendors in the Municipality of Dao. Data were gathered through a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide using in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns and themes from the participants' responses. The results showed that balut making and vending were socio-culturally influenced by family lineage, cultural identity and community. Participants exhibited work practices of discipline and commitment, and establishment of effective daily routines. Production process was described as involving the selection of fertilized duck eggs, incubation, and constant quality control and preparation. Participants' livelihood experiences were described as demonstrating resilience and flexibility. The challenges and opportunities were increasing production costs, fluctuating market demand, support from institutions and the community, seasonal demand, and the establishment of livelihood learning experiences, all contributed to the sustainability of the balut making and vending. The sustainability of balut making and vending was sustained through the preservation of socio-cultural traditions, consistent work practices, organized production processes, resilient livelihood experiences, and community support.

**Keywords:** Balut making, Challenges, Experiences, Practices, Processes, Opportunities, and Sustainability.

## 1. Introduction

*Balut* is a traditional Filipino food made from fertilized duck eggs that have been incubated for 18 days and then cooked for consumption. Balut is regarded as one of the most prominent traditional

foods of the Philippines, which highlights the cultural legacy and cuisine of the country. Apart from being a symbol of culture and tradition, balut has become an economic entity that provides a means of earning for various individuals engaged in the production and selling of balut (Alejandria *et al.*, 2019). Small-scale food production and traditional food-related businesses are vital to local economies and community livelihoods across the globe. In many Asian and developing countries, the food production traditions and practices are important as income generators and for maintaining cultural identity. Safeguarding indigenous knowledge and cultural practices is espoused, alongside the need to provide local communities with other sustainable livelihood means, by various international agencies. Traditional systems of food production have the potential to foster economic growth and serve the purpose of maintaining the cultural identity of a community, as practiced over the years, and the legacy of cultural production (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023; Taye *et al.*, 2026).

In the Philippines, the traditional food systems have become an integral element of rural livelihoods and community systems. Numerous local food products, such as balut, have become part of the Philippine cultural identity and informal economy. In rural areas, where there are limited livelihood means, traditional food systems foster local employment and household income. The national commitment towards preserving traditional food systems is highly beneficial to the promotion of cultural and heritage entrepreneurship and to sustainable local economic growth (Department of Trade and Industry, 2023; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023).

For households in the Municipality of Dao, vending and production of balut support their livelihood, help economically sustain the family, and cater to families with fewer employment options. This livelihood is an outlet for creativity and indigenous knowledge of the community. The process of balut production is a family venture that starts with the selection and incubation of the eggs and ends with the vending. These family norms and traditions are the community's

values and a repository of knowledge and skills that have been accumulated, shaping the balut production and vending. In this study, "Keeping Tradition Alive," referred to the preservation and transmission of balut production and vending as a traditional livelihood, culturally enacted family practices, community engagement, and intergenerational knowledge. Even when the economic and social order changes, these practices are an important traditional, culturally-based livelihood of the people in the Municipality of Dao.

Studies on balut production and vending are few, even with the evident socio-cultural and economic importance. Research that is available has concentrated on the economic side of balut production and the food, hygiene, and safety of balut, neglecting the socio-cultural aspects, production processes, work practices, and livelihood experiences of the people involved. In addition, there is a lack of qualitative research that allows for a comprehensive understanding of how traditional knowledge, cultural values, and informal work practices help maintain the balut industry in rural communities like the Municipality of Dao. Many of the studies that preceded this one showed that family customs, community values, indigenous knowledge, and cultural practices are vital in the preservation of traditional food systems and the livelihoods of the community (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). Nonetheless, because these studies were conducted in other places, they do not adequately account for the socio-cultural realities and the customary practices of balut makers and vendors in the Municipality of Dao. Thus, the documentation of the socio-cultural work practices, production, and livelihood of the local balut industry is necessary. It is hoped that documenting this will preserve cultural heritage and provide grounded evidence for community development initiatives and cultural sustainability (Dordas, 2024).

Furthermore, this study is a step towards meeting several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). By documenting the practices and experiences of balut makers and vendors, this study

helps to understand how traditional livelihoods can be sustained while creating community development, cultural preservation, and local economic resilience. The researcher personally had a motivation for doing this study because of his keen interest in finding out how the balut makers and sellers were able to preserve their culture through the years. The researcher wanted to know how they do their work, how they overcome the obstacles that they face, and why they keep on sustaining balut making as a cultural practice. To address the identified gaps in research, this study aims to explore the socio-cultural influences, work practices, production processes, livelihood experiences, and challenges and opportunities that balut makers and vendors encounter in preserving and sustaining the tradition in the Municipality of Dao. This study hopes to add to the cultural preservation, livelihood, education development, and community-based economic initiatives.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopted the Constructivist methodological perspective, which theorizes that the construction of social reality leads individuals to develop meaning based on the experiences, interactions, and interpretations within their social and cultural contexts. As such, knowledge is viewed as subjective and contextually bound, as opposed to being absolute or universally applicable. From this perspective, the researcher's core interest lies in how participants develop meaning from experiences within their social context, as opposed to the search for a singular objective reality (Pretorius, 2024).

Based on the perspective outlined, this study employed a qualitative-phenomenological research design. It was appropriate for this study as it sought to develop an extensive and unembellished account of the socio-cultural contexts, work ethics, production, and lived realities, along with the constraints and prospects faced by the vendors and producers of balut in the Municipality of Dao. Qualitative-phenomenological research is grounded in participant experience and seeks to give voice to the participant in a straightforward manner, and in the absence of any variation to the research context. Social Constructivist Theory provided further justification for this study. It asserts

that knowledge, skills, and cultural practices are acquired and perpetuated through social interaction and shared experiences, and may be through the transmission of practice and knowledge across generations. Within the scope of this study, balut production and vending were viewed as community-based customary livelihood practices learned through participation, observation, and knowledge transfer within the family. The study utilized in-depth interviews (IDIs) during the data collection phase using a researcher-made interview guide. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically according to Braun and Clarke's six-stage framework (2006, 2019). As per their framework, the stages include becoming familiar with the data, the generation of initial codes, and the searching, reviewing, defining, and naming of themes, and the final write-up.

The participants were the 15 balut makers and vendors in the Municipality of Dao. Fifteen (15) participants were deemed a suitable number since qualitative research focuses on gathering extensive, relevant information from people who have contact with the occurrence being researched. They were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in balut making and vending in the Municipality of Dao and possessed the firsthand experiences necessary to address the objectives of the study. All participants met the inclusion criteria of the study and were considered capable of providing relevant and in-depth information. This study applied ethical principles for fairness, respect, and protection of participants during all phases of the research. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview was conducted. Their confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Socio-Cultural Influences in Balut Making and Vending

Based on the narratives, the preservation of the practice was anchored on family practices, economic and cultural needs, and community support. These

aspects allowed the practice to withstand the test of time, even with the changing economic and social circumstances. Based on the thematic analysis, five themes were identified from the lived experiences of the participants, such as family tradition and intergenerational knowledge transfer, livelihood as a means of family survival, community patronage and local identity, preservation of traditional beliefs and practices, and passing the tradition to the next generation. Respondents emphasized that the practice is inherited from parents and reinforced by community support, making it both a livelihood and a cultural identity marker. The persistence of family legacy implies that balut making functioned as both a livelihood and a cultural anchor. It strengthened community identity and ensured resilience against changing economic conditions. The emphasis on inheritance and continuity indicates that cultural transmission is essential for long-term viability, positioning balut making as a heritage-based livelihood system.

The findings supported Rocillo-Aquino *et al.* (2021) and Ghosh *et al.* (2023), who argued that traditional food production embodies cultural identity and heritage, preserved through intergenerational transmission. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, (2023) further asserted that intangible cultural heritage must be passed down to remain resilient, while the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2023) emphasized that indigenous food systems sustain livelihoods precisely because they are embedded in family and community practices.

### **Work Practices in Sustaining Balut Making and Vending**

The work practices of balut makers and vendors were related to the routine activities, behavior, and obligations that they perform in the course of their daily work. Based on the thematic analysis, four themes were identified: maintaining organized daily work routines, demonstrating commitment and responsibility in work, practicing customer-oriented service, and working through cooperation and shared responsibilities. The participants' narratives illustrated a systematic work process, from procuring eggs to

monitoring incubation and organizing daily tasks. Such work organization enables them to manage multiple responsibilities while ensuring that daily operations continue efficiently. This implies that organization is not only a technical necessity but also a cultural value, reflecting perseverance and resilience in traditional livelihoods. This finding corroborated the Food and Agriculture Organization's (2023) description of how small food producers sustain their businesses by developing work routines through order and discipline, in addition to knowledge gained through experience. In the same manner, Heizer *et al.* (2020) described that the presence of order and discipline in a work routine fosters operational effectiveness and efficiency. These findings are validated by scholarly perspectives. In the Philippine context, the Department of Trade and Industry (2022) highlighted that organization and consistency are key factors in the resilience of micro, small, and medium enterprises. The testimonies of participants aligned with these perspectives, confirming that work organization is integral to sustaining balut making as both a livelihood and a cultural practice.

### **Production Processes of Balut Makers and Vendors**

The production processes of an individual balut maker or vendor involved knowledge, diligence, and above all, the ability to sustain the production of balut that meets the expectations of the consumers and the standards of the market. Thematic analysis yielded four main themes: careful selection and preparation of fertilized duck eggs, systematic incubation and monitoring of egg development, proper cooking and preparation for distribution, and maintaining product quality through continuous inspection.

This implies that balut making requires a balance of skill, patience, and attentiveness, where continuous monitoring becomes a safeguard against production failure and a guarantee of authenticity. It also suggests that livelihood sustainability depends on producers' ability to integrate traditional practices with quality control, positioning egg preparation and monitoring as critical checkpoints in the production cycle. Bondoc *et al.* (2022) underscored that the integrity of raw materials and egg quality is fundamental to the quality of balut, while the World Health Organization (2022)

highlighted that safe handling practices reduce risks and enhance consumer trust. These scholarly perspectives aligned directly with the participants' lived experiences, confirming that egg preparation and monitoring were not isolated tasks but integral components of a broader system of traditional food practices.

### **Livelihood Experiences of Balut Makers and Vendors**

Based on the thematic analysis, four major themes emerged such as balut making as a source of family livelihood, persevering through difficult beginnings, demonstrating resourcefulness to sustain the livelihood and motivation to continue despite challenges. These indicate a blend of economic creativity and adeptness that helped these families and individuals meet the needs of daily subsistence. It was also indicative of their entrepreneurial spirit and ability to create and seize opportunities. The narratives illustrated that hope functioned as a powerful coping mechanism, enabling families to endure financial struggles and maintain their livelihood despite challenges. This implies that hope and optimism are not merely emotional responses but essential cultural values that reinforce resilience, strengthen determination, and sustain household stability. Heizer *et al.* (2020) noted that perseverance and positive outlooks are critical in sustaining small-scale food enterprises, while the World Bank (2021) highlighted that hope and community trust play decisive roles in household resilience. Alejandria *et al.* (2019) explained that when emotional resilience and commitment are sustained, both culture and livelihood are likewise preserved. Motivation and the ability to adapt were also identified by the Food and Agriculture Organization (2023) as critical factors in sustaining informal food-based livelihoods. These scholarly perspectives aligned directly with the participants' lived experiences, confirming that hope is both a psychological resource and a cultural practice.

### **Challenges Faced by Balut Makers and Vendors**

Based on the thematic analysis, two major themes emerged such as challenges in production and resource constraints and challenges in market demand and sales fluctuation. The challenges were compounded when

resource limitations, such as prolonged power outages, occurred simultaneously, further disrupting the incubation process, indicating that balut makers are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in raw material supply, which not only affects their income but also threatens the stability of their livelihood. This highlights that sustaining balut making requires not only technical skill but also the ability to navigate external constraints that are beyond the producers' control.

Bondoc *et al.* (2022) noted that the integrity and consistency of raw materials are foundational to maintaining product quality and efficiency. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organization (2023) stressed that shortages in agricultural inputs, such as eggs, directly affect household livelihoods and community food systems. Heizer *et al.* (2020) further highlighted that small-scale food producers must adapt to resource constraints to sustain operations and preserve authenticity.

### **Opportunities Experienced by Balut Makers and Vendors**

Through thematic analysis of the participants' narratives, three major themes emerged such as opportunities through institutional and community support, opportunities through seasonal and continuous demand, and opportunities through livelihood learning and experience. These opportunities enabled them to sustain balut making and vending while preserving it as a meaningful source of livelihood in the Municipality of Dao.

The result indicated that participants view their experience as an opportunity to teach others and encourage the continuity of balut making and vending. Passing on knowledge to interested individuals helps preserve the livelihood while ensuring that the skills and practices are sustained across generations. Bondoc *et al.* (2022) noted that skill mastery and knowledge transfer are essential for sustaining product quality and efficiency, while the Food and Agriculture Organization (2023) emphasized that experiential learning strengthens household resilience and community food systems. Heizer *et al.* (2020) further underscored that continuous improvement through experience enhances sustainability in small-scale enterprises.

#### 4. Conclusion

The enduring tradition of balut making and vending in the Municipality of Dao is sustained not only by its economic value but also by the strong socio-cultural foundation established through family heritage, cultural identity, and community support. Efficient work routines, responsible task performance, and collaborative efforts enable balut makers and vendors to maintain productive and stable livelihood operations. Maintaining proper production procedures contributes to product quality, food safety, and consumer confidence while preserving traditional production methods. Resilience, perseverance, and financial resourcefulness are essential qualities that enable balut makers and vendors to sustain their livelihood despite operational and economic difficulties. The production- and market-related challenges continue to influence the sustainability of balut making and vending. The availability of institutional support, community participation, favorable market opportunities, and accumulated livelihood experience enhances their capacity to sustain and further develop their traditional livelihood.

#### 5. Acknowledgment

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#### 6. Conflicts of Interest

The author proclaims no conflicts of interest.

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