

Negritos de Cebu: Livelihood and resource management practice

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to describe the different and changing livelihood and resource management strategies of migrant Aetas in Cebu, utilizing mini-ethnographic study methods namely observations, field notes, interviews, analysis of secondary documents and immersions. The Aetas in Naga, Cebu were originally from Antique then moved down to Barotac Viejo in Iloilo and northern Negros sugar haciendas before settling in Naga, Cebu. From being hunter-gatherers and Swidden agriculturists, they gradually shifted to wage work, men adapted to working in construction sites and women selling basic forest products like charcoal and medicinal herbs. In the process, the different individual and household livelihood conservation approaches were analyzed taking into account specific patterns of resource mobilization and livelihood. Through this migration movement, Aeta women and men experimented with different livelihood strategies. This type of evolution, with wage employment, subsistence farming and dependence on natural resources from the forest, was continued in their resettled area by maintaining contacts with other Aeta groups, which opted to remain in their original abode even in situations of fast-changing environmental changes of degradation and precarious peace and order. This is also expressed in their set of traditions and belief system related resource management. The migrants are undergoing communal changes but are also able to maintain a sense of continuity by maintaining their mobility and being flexible in their livelihood strategies and agro-forestry practices. These are in continuous change which can be supported by developmental interventions.

Keywords: Aetas, Cebu, indigenous peoples, livelihood, traditional knowledge

I. INTRODUCTION

Aetas or Negritos, as labeled by the Spaniards, is a predominantly nomadic, hunting and gathering ethnic group found in the greater Visayas regions of the Philippines. First settlement was believed to be in the Western Visayas area then some of them moved to Central Visayas specifically Naga, Cebu (see Fig.1) around 1980's due to limited opportunities, decreasing agricultural resources, deteriorating peace and order situation and pressure from lowlanders (Grey, 2015). With this transition and eventually resettlement, they brought with them traditional knowledge and unique cultural practices in terms of livelihood (selling traditional medicine) and resource management in terms of connection with spirits in nature (Dela Pena, 2009; Grey, 2015). After almost two decades of settling

in a relatively urban area, very much different from where they used to inhabit, certain livelihood and resource management practices might have already shifted mainly because of acculturation. Thus, an in-depth look on the livelihood and resource management changes will help in understanding the struggles and how to assist these indigenous peoples to preserve traditional knowledge and to keep up with mainstream society (Regpala, Motin, & Balawag, 2010)

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized qualitative methods in gathering data. The research team comprised of partner institutions that are serving the Ati community in Naga, like Gawad Kalinga and proper permissions from authorities were secured then immersion in the area

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was first conducted before data gathering, lastly, a partner institution secured permission from the National Commission of Indigenous Peoples to conduct the study.

Focused group discussions, interviews, informal interactions for a period of one year, using audio recorders and interview notes to record important findings. Analysis of secondary data, which include documents from local social welfare office, news reports, other researches and the local government, and other findings or information in collaboration with other researchers who have made contact with the Aetas, using their notes, transcripts and recordings were also analyzed to triangulate the information gathered.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 1980's a small band of related families opted to migrate and find contractual work in sugar cane plantation in Negros Occidental and eventually moved to Naga, Cebu as ambulant vendors of medicinal plants/small lizards. The resettle Aetas still retain traditional means of livelihood, which is peddling of traditional medicines (*materia medica*), made up of natural materials, such tree barks, stones, etc. (Dela Pena, 2009). These medicines were not just for illness but also to prevent misfortune and affliction by jealous or annoyed spirits *buyag* (roughly translated as admonish). Table 1 shows the name, materials used and ailments cured. With this, there has been a shift from the traditional hunting, gathering and agriculture to a capitalist setting. Aetas in Cebu maintained their contacts with those in Western Visayas (Iloilo) as suppliers of herbs and plants. Thambia (2015) stated that the Bhuket tribe of Sarawak Malaysia maintained linkage with their agriculturist contacts to continue to supply them materials for livelihood, also observed such behavior in a study.

Skills training for livelihood assistance from local government has reached the Aetas in this area, causing some of the younger Aetas to slowly shift from selling tradition medicines to skilled work. Due to the migration of the small band of families, a shift from a forest-like home to the metro-urban location had affected some of the traditions of the Aetas. With intermarriage, religion will also be affected; animism still is present but has been indoctrinated by Christian teachings since there are certain religious sects doing evangelization in the settlement. Christian marriage rites are slowly being observed.

Lastly, because of this resettlement education and literacy has reached the Aetas, especially the current Aeta children. Due to a closer proximity of a public school in their settlement, most of the Aeta children are now schooling, thus being more literate than their

parents.

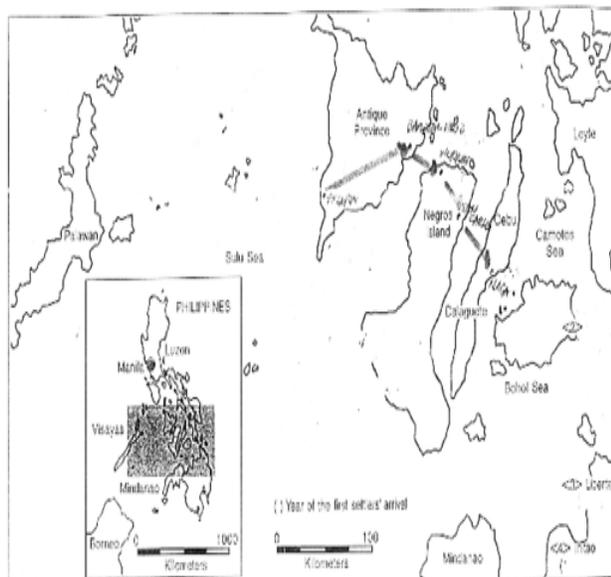


Figure 1. Settlements of the Datagueiteñon Migrants

The table above illustrates the migration path traversed by the first Aetas from their native home going to Naga City, Cebu.

Table 1. Common medicines sold by Aetas in Cebu

English Names	Local Names	Ailment Cured
Alum	Tawas	Swollen tongue, armpit odor
Sulfur	Asupli	Skin disease, warts
Abalone shell	Kapinan	For good luck in homes, businesses
Bracelet	Brislit	Protection from spirits, sorcery
White coral	Bato balisong	Avoid bad luck, protection from sorcery

The table shows the common raw materials used for livelihood by the Aetas. They convert these materials into products sold as traditional medicines and good luck charms.

IV. CONCLUSION

The small band of Aeta who migrated have experienced both positive and negative impacts on livelihood, resource management and other changes. Being close to a metro-urban area has allowed them to access better business markets, also easier access to services in terms of health and education, from both government and non-government entities. However, in contrast to these benefits, certain cultural practices might disappear over time, due to acculturation and assimilation of external practices. They have gained better livelihood opportunities, however eventually, erosion of cultural identity of these indigenous people, in terms of resource management will soon occur. With this, preservation of their culture while allowing them to integrate in mainstream society must be given attention by both government and the private sector.

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