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ABSTRACT

The Aeta Magbukún are an isolated Indigenous tribe retaining primarily subsistence hunter-gathering strategies within the declining forests in the Bataan Province on Luzon Island in the Philippines. In the last decade, the Aeta Magbukún have been increasingly threatened by the expansion of logging, agriculture, and urban development by non-Indigenous Philippine populations, exacerbating historical dispossession, poverty, and political discrimination. The Aeta Magbukún continue to strive for recognition of their connection with, and rights to inhabit their ancestral forest domains. As a result of the increasing pace of encroachment, the Aeta Magbukún are forced to undergo rapid acculturation within the mainstream Philippine societal complex. The Aeta Magbukún are adapting many of their traditional forest-based livelihoods and attempting to engage in small-scale informal commerce to procure sufficient food throughout the year and adapt to a largely monetary culture. Through necessity they are clearing small parcels of their forest for (illegal) charcoal production and swidden farming to reduce the severity of the lack of food during the wet season, when they often starve. At the same time they are conflictingly being encouraged by various NGOs and government entities to simultaneously protect their forest and culture, send their children to school, plant non-food timber tree species, and adopt agriculture, grazing, and commodity commerce. This chapter describes the major socio-cultural influences and history,
including ‘western development’ and international climate change-related forest conservation policies alongside traditional forest food procurement and hunting strategies, and their adaptation to meet basic survival needs. The chapter is contextualised within international climate-change related forestry policies aimed at protecting forests in developing countries. The longevity of these policies are ambiguous and generally require proponents to demonstrate land tenure security. This leads to a particularly heavy burden on the Aeta when compounded by the pace of change socioculturally, politically, ecologically, and economically.

Keywords: Aeta Magbukún; Indigenous; forest; development; culture; Bataan; Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

This work attempts to capture a selected Indigenous experience and associated means of adaptation unique to the culture of the people known as the Aetas of Bataan, in particular the Magbukún tribe from the region around Mt. Mariveles on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. The Aeta Magbukún live in upland forests, remain with little material and cultural possessions [1], and exhibit cultural fundamentals of ‘communalness’ [2]. Despite genetic and anthropological evidence building their case for recognition as Indigenous peoples and rights to occupy and use ancestral lands, the Aeta Magbukún continue to endure dispossession, poverty, and political discrimination through decades of protracted land rights processes [3]. Within the context of international climate change adaptation and mitigation activities, this chapter seeks to describe how a selected Indigenous culture has adapted to multiple changes in a relatively short period of time within a complex milieu of direct local cultural, economic, environmental, and social pressures at a time when the international community is taking a greater interest in their link to climate change, forest ecosystems, and associated global development and Indigenous rights initiatives.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group II (WGII) stated in the Fourth Assessment Report (4AR) that “…special attention needs to be given to indigenous peoples with subsistence livelihoods and groups with limited access to information and few means of adaptation” [4] (pg 248-249). Similarly, the WGII 4AR also stated “Mountains increasingly serve as refuges from direct human impacts for many endemic species...[.] many goods for subsistence livelihoods... home to many indigenous peoples... [and] a significant fraction of biospheric carbon (28% of forests are in mountains)” [4] pg 232. Forest ecosystems have been heavily depleted in the Philippines [5], with around 16 million ha in the Philippines (or ~50% half of the national land area) classified as public forestlands, with an estimated ~7 million ha (~25%) remaining forested [6]. Links between government agencies and communities in the Philippines can be generalised as currently undeveloped, particularly in terms of facilitating successful forest establishment and management [7]. Thus implementing forest conservation measures can jeopardise traditional livelihoods, particularly in poorer regions [8]. Historically, forest conservation pressures have fallen disproportionately on poor local inhabitants at the subsistence level, often removing local inhabitant’s rights of residence, access, and resource use, including the loss of non-consumptive uses and future use, even for places with cultural or religious value [9]. This has occurred over large forested areas in the mountainous Bataan peninsula, with the forced
removal of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people without distinction. As a result, ‘conservation’ is commonly (and often accurately) viewed by local peoples as an intervention to gain control over land and resources [10].

In stark contrast to local experiences, generalised international views of traditional Indigenous land-use practices commonly include the notion of its equivalence with sustainability and conservation [11]. Yet, Indigenous peoples are unwilling to be erroneously dichotomised as either ecosystem destroyers, or romanticised conservationists of a pristine environment [12]. Furthermore, Indigenous cultures are wrongly viewed as static and isolated populations [13], and in practice they coexist with non-Indigenous peoples, who together influence ecosystems and their respective cultures over time [10]. Therefore, a balance between forest use and conservation should ideally be developed through recognising what local people (including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples) believe is important and the local socio-economic complex in which they exist [14].

Today the Aeta Magbukún tribe, as an aggregated group, largely continue a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This subsistence lifestyle within the declining area of their forested and mountainous ancestral domain exposes them to external socio-political influences and resulting ecological change. An acute example occurred on 28 September 2006 when a typhoon almost annihilated the Aeta Magbukún community by extraordinarily intense flash flooding previously unseen within living memory. The extreme movement of mud and debris was exacerbated by (legal and illegal) forestry activity, revealing the insufficiency of existing forestry practices [10]. Indigenous peoples must be able to manage and negotiate both internally and externally forest-related conservation and extraction activities. Where their social capital is weak, NGOs are often required to be intermediaries [7]. While Indigenous peoples are increasingly seeking a level of autonomy in local decision-making, they likewise do not want to be ‘left alone’ to manage a depleted resource base with inadequate expertise and a range of entities with variable interests [10]. For example, the Philippines has long seen the coming and going of various forestry/conservation funding programmes, rent-seeking/phantom NGOs and other entities who profit from government expenditures and tax concessions at the expense of genuine forestry and conservation-related activities [7]. Therefore, this chapter seeks to document and analyse how the Indigenous Aeta Magbukún have adapted over time to the numerous cultural, economic, environmental, and social challenges and interests within their mountain forest ancestral lands.

**EARLY CULTURAL ADAPTATION**

**Lifestyles Post European/American Colonisation**

European colonisation by the Spanish in 1565 imposed Western notions of land ownership on Indigenous peoples in the Philippines, with laws that were commonly intolerant of traditional Indigenous notions of land ownership [15]. Historically known as “Negritos” (meaning small blacks in Spanish), in documents such as J. Montano’s “Voyage aux Philippines” published in Paris in 1886 [16], the socio-cultural adaptations of Indigenous Aeta groups have occurred primarily through increasing geographic proximity to non-Indigenous

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1 This research will avoid the use of the term “Negrito” simply to avoid negative racial connotations associated with the Spanish colonist perspective.
cultures, rather than through direct inputs from governments or non-government institutions (both religious and non-religious) [2, 17]. From the 1700s, with Spanish and later the American colonial rulers, the Philippines experienced a major influx of migrants and a rapidly increasing birth rate, which influenced the Indigenous peoples way of life to varying degrees [15]. The diversification into more sedentary agricultural production systems and wage labour activities has occurred through ecological degradation, and economic and insecure traditional land tenure pressures [18]. Due to growing uncertainty in ancestral land tenure and limited cultivation options on the steep slopes of Mt. Mariveles, Aeta families were forced to retain short-term socio-economic activities such as hunting and foraging. Whilst many Aeta groups have successfully implemented an agricultural socio-economic lifestyle akin to lowland farmers, others who did attempt agricultural lifestyles often felt restricted in their options and chose to leave the lowlands for more mobility in their ancestral lands [19].

Recent Accelerated Sociocultural Change

Prior to the Mt. Pinatubo eruption in 1991 there were no governmental guidelines to protect Indigenous rights in the Philippines [2]. However, since the eruption, the abruptness of internationally and nationally imposed changes in governmental responsibilities and support services aimed specifically towards Indigenous peoples have disrupted and arguably disadvantaged Indigenous individuals [20]. Whilst settlement policies, social programmes, and education expanded the cultural references of the Aeta [17], it has also changed many aspects of the culture. For example, ‘fast foods’ which many former villagers discovered for the first time in Mt. Pinatubo evacuation centres have become favoured food stuffs [2], and the traditional lubay (G-strings) and other native dresses which were regular attire pre-1991, have now been replaced by western clothing [2]. Social dynamics have also changed, with the Apo, or ‘old wise man’s’ knowledge increasingly superfluous in the new socio-economic, political, and education systems which require younger, more adaptable Aetas with greater access to non-Aeta knowledge taking leadership roles [2]. Whilst viewing Indigenous peoples as communities wanting to maintain a static culture based in the past is erroneous [20], recent interventions into traditional cultural dynamics demonstrate how external agents (governments, NGOs, consultants, etc.) attempted to ‘educate’ the Indigenous peoples, while the communities themselves are relegated predominantly to a passive and reactive partner [8]. This is particularly true in conservation interventions that also often exhibit a paternalistic perspective on Indigenous knowledge of the land [8]. In stark contrast the Aetas of Zambales whose ancestral lands were heavily affected by the massive Mt Pinatubo eruption, the Aeta Magbukún of Bataan were essentially unaffected [3, 10]. Their experience has been one of gradual expansion of non-Aeta agriculture and population centres in Luzon, resulting in Aeta tribes having to move into the more isolated locations. As a consequence, the Aeta’s traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyles continue to orient their current socio-economic activities to the present, including the preference of independence [19]. These past and present characterisations were consistent with the actions of the Magbukún Aetas during the WWII “Bataan Death March”, where the combined USA and Philippine military (80,000 soldiers) surrendered in the Bataan Peninsula. While the invading Japanese forced the soldiers to march 105 km to the north, in which 10,000 soldiers died [21], the Aetas avoided capture and sought the protection around the rocky crater of Mt. Mariveles [1].
Forest Ecosystem Management/Conservation and Indigenous Land Rights

In discussing the cultural dimensions of climate change exposure and vulnerability in the IPCC’s Special Report on ‘Managing the risks and extreme events and disasters of advance climate change adaptation’, chapter 2 states “…indigenous populations are frequently dependent on primary production and the natural resource base while being subject to (relatively) poor socioeconomic conditions…” [22] pg 85. Land tenure insecurity and ambiguity are major impediments to carbon sequestration activities [23]. As the Kyoto Protocol’s Article 3.4 includes the option of accounting for forest management, there is a question to whom any benefits would pass to if they should arise [24]. In practice, forest conservation and Indigenous rights policies have long been incompatible in the ancestral lands of the Aeta Magbukún. The Bataan Natural Park (BNP) is one of ten reserves of the Conservation of Priority Protected Areas Project, funded by the Global Environmental Facility to the value of USD16 million over seven years through the World Bank [8]. The BNP was originally established as Bataan National Park, by Legislative Act No. 3915 in 1932 that reserved 23 688 ha of land. Subsequent to the Act, the some Aeta groups and other peoples living within the boundaries were removed and forced to resettle in mixed communities [25], and while prohibited from hunting and gathering food in the forests, some adopted agriculture or provided domestic services to non-Aeta to survive. Such enforced local community exclusions from ancestral lands has enabled officials to engage in clandestine resource extraction by external operators in protected lands [8].

More recently the 1993 Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) ILO Convention No. 169, the Philippine Republic Act No. 8371 (known as the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997), influenced the amalgamation of the Philippine category of Indigenous cultural communities with the international concept of ‘Indigenous peoples’ [26]. The landmark IPRA was only the second national Indigenous rights legislation in existence at the time, the first being in Australia [20], and is the key legislation that recognises Indigenous people’s rights and extends Philippine Constitutional definitions of Indigenous for preservation and historical continuity [27]. Particularly important to the Aeta Magbukún, in theory the IPRA provides for recognition of communal and individual rights of Indigenous people to their traditional lands, continued state support for self-governance, and self-determination to freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development [26, 28]. The National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) has the mandate to implement the IPRA, yet the NCIP’s trifling budget has rendered it largely ineffectual [27]. The NCIP has the legal authority to issue a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), which is a provision for securing rights to their ancestral domain by Indigenous people, and refers to a title formally recognising the rights of possession and ownership in accordance with national law [29]. Protracted and detailed legal processes and the heavy financial investment required to obtaining a CADT is a fundamental barrier to those with no assets, finance, and poor literacy and numeracy [3]. Despite these challenges a tribe known as the Aeta Magbukún of Pastolan were issued a CADT of almost 4,356 ha on March 25, 2004, representing around 45 percent of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone [29]. This required only six years when supported by the World Bank, accelerating the process in an effort to develop the Freeport Zone [29]. Also in 2004, a tribe known as the Aeta Magbukún of
Kanawan submitted an application to NCIP for a CADT of 10,970 ha of ancestral land, almost half the size of the entire BNP, with more than half of this claim inside the BNP [25]. More recently, in 2007, the Aeta Magbukún of Biaan near Mariveles also submitted an application to the local NCIP office. The long process of obtaining rights over their ancestral domains is nonetheless underway.

ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL AND NEW INFLUENCES
Traditional Aeta Magbukún Forest Hunting and Gathering Adaptations

While the Aetas around Mt. Mariveles were traditionally only hunter-gatherers, and did not practice agriculture in the conventional sense [1], they were known to actively disperse forest tree seeds to influence the diversity of forest species [30]. Pagdadanso is a general Aeta Magbukún term that refers to several traditional activities of gathering and foraging for food sources in the forest and rivers of Mariveles. Gathering/oranging is primarily carried out by women, but not always, and common pagdadanso activities include pamamatibat (gathering susō, a freshwater shellfish), pangangalakal (foraging for wild tubers), and sometimes panumuyay (honey gathering) [10]. Pulot, (honey) is an almost exclusive traditional Aeta commodity in the forests of Mariveles. At the present time non-Indigenous locals source honey from the Aeta Magbukún, and during the tag-pulot (honey season), an Aeta family may produce an average of 3.5-7 litres a week, and sometimes more during peak season. Tag-pulot commences around the second half of December for the entire dry season, peaks during March to May, and is a time of abundance. [10].

Hunting remains commonplace among the male members of the Aeta Magbukún tribe, and whilst the bow and arrow has given way to guns, traditional silo (traps) remain in common use. Common hunting activities include: pangangaso (hunting) of babuy ramo (wild boar), bakulaw (monkeys), and very rarely uta (deer); paninilo (the setting of traps for wild boar and wild cats), and; pangangati (trapping red jungle fowl, or labuyo) [10]. Pig fat is highly valued and the wild pig (Sus barbatus) is the main game animal [31]. Pangangati involves sagar (fowl traps), or less commonly, ambush. While Aeta generally hunt no more than what they can consume or sell (preventing salanta – the imbalance of nature [30]), many non-Indigenous subsistence farmers in the region keep insufficient domestic animals to supply their own protein requirements [13], which has been a historical means of trade in the Philippines.

Non-traditional Swidden Farming, Charcoal, and Cash Income Adaptations

Apart from traditional food resource practices, swidden² farming, known as gasak farming in the Aeta Magbukún language has occurred to a small extent in a few Aeta Magbukún tribes [18]. Swidden farming has developed through contact with non-Indigenous peoples in the area in recent decades. Common gasak plants include sweet potato, taro, and banana [10]. The Aeta Magbukún practice lusungan, where volunteers working on an

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² Swidden farming is the creation of crops by removing smaller vegetation and planting crops around the trees which are not removed.
individual’s gasak bring their own food. The role of volunteer and gasak ‘owner’ is rotated amongst the tribe [30].

The wet season is not an easy time for the Aeta. Uling (charcoal) is of high demand in the local town market, and the Aeta Magbukún are now engaging in charcoal production. Despite the high demand, there is a local charcoal embargo in place and charcoal producers, Aeta and non-Aeta alike, must travel through checkpoints, pay fines, and risk having their produce confiscated. Aeta Magbukún pag-uling (charcoal making) is a basic survival strategy to purchase food [10]. Although charcoal production is illegal, the Aeta state that at their very small-scale of production the practice does not pose a threat to their forests. The production of charcoal is undertaken using a simple built up earthen pit dug into the ground, filled with wood, and covered with leaves and soil to regulate air flow. Charcoal production occurs to reduce the weight of the wood fuel for transport, as it weighs 30-20% of the original weight after conversion [32]. However, charcoal production can be a major problem when large-scale inefficient charcoal production occurs [33]. Developing countries account for the overwhelming demand for wood charcoal, and it currently is responsible for much forest loss and health problems as it is often unsustainably and inefficiently produced [34-36], and a major net greenhouse gas emission source [37].

In recent decades the establishment of billion-dollar financial markets related to forestry carbon sequestration activities present incentives to land owners in developing countries [23]. The ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries’ (the UN-REDD Programme), is generating much interest in options for forest management [24]. However, there remain challenges for implementing suitable methodological standards for the complexity of afforestation and reforestation project activities. Reflective of these challenges, the Executive Board of the Kyoto Protocol met in 2012 to adopt clarifications for small-scale afforestation/reforestation projects. How these amendments reduce the burden on small-scale projects suitable to the scale of Aeta Magbukún ancestral lands will be known in due course. However, doubt over the historically high transaction costs of negotiating, contracting, implementing, registration, monitoring, verifying, etc., is an ongoing and major barrier to small projects [23, 38-40]. Furthermore, the transparency of ‘non-commodity’ market mechanisms and on-site activities in developing countries will be crucial for smallholder afforestation/reforestation projects [24], particularly when considering the additional complexities of Indigenous lands with insecure ancestral tenure and a culture of communalness. Despite ‘the tragedy of the commons’ often occurring in forest ecosystems, sustaining ‘common ownership and control’ of forests subject to enforced individual ‘use rights’ are known to be successful strategies [41]. In this case, the unique characteristic of combining communal ownership with individual use rights for both bee hives and swidden farming plots is a cultural advantage in relation to development projects for the Aeta Magbukún. However, careful communication and education must occur to limit the risk of conflict between Aetas by inadvertent exclusion in communally owned land decision-making [42]. The increased demand for forest resources by the expanding non-Indigenous population in Mariveles provides the Aeta Magbukún with commercial opportunities to exploit their ancestral lands [10]. However, at the present time many Aeta lack basic numeracy and literacy, and insufficient commerce and monetary skills to take advantage of these opportunities [19].
Recent Christian/NGO Influences

The NGO’s role has been fundamental in the recent Aeta Magbukún socio-economic development in Mariveles, and continue to be a significant presence in the community. In terms of non-governmental support, the first assistance to the Aetas was provided by Christian churches, primarily due to the relative absence of state or any other external institutions in more remote areas [27]. More recently, and especially after the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption, various government and Christian NGOs have implemented initiatives with and for the Aetas under the guise of disaster relief for various ends. These ends include forest conservation, development, resource extraction, charity, and also Christianisation.

The Caritas Bataan - Indigenous People’s Apostolate (CB-IPA), a division within the Diocesan Commission on Social Services, was established in 1998, and was the pioneering NGO giving attention to the Aeta Magbukún of Mariveles. Its major contribution to all Aeta tribes of Bataan is its facilitation of ancestral domain claims, and scholarship programmes for Aeta schoolchildren. Through a government-NGO initiative, the first Aeta school at the present tribe’s primary site of Bayan-bayanan was established in 2003. The Entrepreneurs Volunteer Association Charity Foundation (EVACF), with funding from several Anglican Churches in Morpeth, Northumberland, UK and in cooperation with NCIP, built a two classroom school named the Morpeth Concord Aeta School. The establishment of this school gave the Aeta community greater access to education. At around the same time, the Institute for Foundational Learning (IFL) came to the Aeta community. The IFL is a Christian non-profit organisation dedicated to extend outreach through agricultural technology, educational training and various mission programmes, establishing medical missions, basic and adult literacy classes, and community organising measures, including the provision of housing and potable water through numerous volunteer efforts. The IFL is still actively involved in community development initiatives among the Aeta Magbukún with two elementary school teachers of the now renamed Biaan Aeta School, who are the same two primary volunteers from IFL since it arrived around a decade ago.

CONCLUSION

The Aetas are known for their innovativeness, flexibility, and mobility when faced with numerous disruptive natural and political events. By combining and/or switching hunting and gathering activities and repeatedly changing their location, traditional Aetas continue to maintain a largely traditional lifestyle to secure their short-term existence [19]. While they have numerous opportunities to engage in internationally-focussed development forest ecosystem management activities and programmes, they continue to not be formally recognised as Indigenous, and remain essentially landless. Indigenous peoples require a degree of control over their territory and resources, and increasingly require partnerships with the scientific community, governments, and international development agencies to effectively manage forest ecosystems within the complex milieu that now exists in and around their ancestral domains [12]. The role for Indigenous people in forest resource management and conservation has long been challenging, especially when long-time non-Indigenous residents also subsist on local forest resources [9]. Despite new genetic evidence bolstering their
traditional ancestral history, the fundamental concern among the Aeta Magbukún tribes remains the continued non-Indigenous encroachment into increasingly smaller parcels of remaining ancestral domains [10]. As their hunter-gatherer livelihood remains fundamentally tied to their forest ancestral domains, their leaders acknowledge the need for securing their tenure. The fundamental limitation of poor literacy, numeracy, language, and cultural barriers will require the Aeta Magbukún to engage with local power structures. The added complexity of engaging with a sizable population of very poor non-Indigenous neighbours who share similar disadvantage and poverty, and also inequity with the small minority of local wealthy and influential families on which many Aeta are directly and indirectly dependent, will be a challenge [3]. Nonetheless, while acculturation during the past few years has been a difficult time for the Aeta Magbukún in Mariveles, continued adaptation to the language, social, education, economic, monetary, political, cultural, technical, environmental (etc.) systems and knowledge of non-Aeta will enable them to access the additional capacity for decision-making regarding management of their ancestral forest ecosystem in a sustainable and sustained manner [41]. Within this context, to avoid overtly culturally disruptive interventions, various organisations and agencies will be well advised to communicate directly with local Indigenous inhabitants to understand their remarkably unique predicament, concerns, and abilities [10]. Doing so may prevent a repeat of past and present approaches of forest ecosystem management that may jeopardise traditional livelihoods, and remove rights of residence, access, and resource use, including the loss of non-consumptive uses and future use.

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