



Participatory Development of Indigenous People in the Bataan Natural Park

Lourdes J. Cruz

(Professor Emeritus, Marine Science Institute, University of the Philippines)

Segundo Romero

(Director, Innovations at the Base of the Pyramid, Ateneode Manila University)

ABSTRACT

DESCRIPTION

In 2010, a new national administration was elected in the Philippines. The new government means new people at the national, provincial, and local levels working with relevant intermediaries and development actors to take a new look at existing government programs and refresh and update these. Such a process is particularly critical and sensitive in the case of indigenous peoples such as the Magbukún Aytas of Kanawan in Morong, Bataan. So far, government programs to assist them have been delicate attempts to balance their traditions and culture with requirements of the mainstream political, administrative, and social system. On one hand there have been a lack of understanding and responsiveness of outsiders to their situation, and on the other hand, a lack of capacity on the part of the indigenous people to make full use of opportunities presented by the outsiders.

Learning objectives:

To encourage discussion and improve understanding on the challenges of actively engaging indigenous people and communities in community development strategies and programmes.

To design, integrate, and implement sustainable production and consumption initiatives for indigenous people and communities.

Subjects covered:

Indigenous peoples; Sustainable development; Multi-stakeholder analysis; Management strategies; Governance; Sustainable production and consumption; Socio-cultural development index

Setting:

- Kanawan Negritos Reservation Area: 227 hectares



- Population of the Reservation: 297 in 2004 and 403 in 2010
- Number of households: 89 in 2004 and about 100 in 2010

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the University of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University and the publisher.



INTRODUCTION

The Negritos, referred to as Aytas, are considered to be among the most disadvantaged indigenous people of the Philippines. With a shrinking forest cover and degradation of what remains, the traditional way of hunting and gathering from the forest has become much less productive. A survey done by Motin et al. (2006) in 2005 showed that the Magbukún Aytas of Kanawan got by with only \$0.47 per day per person.

Empowerment of Aytas initially involved education with respect to their rights and responsibilities followed by guided discussions on how to preserve their cultural heritage. Subsequently, they actively participated in the formulation of a project to conserve the forest and establish sustainable means of livelihood. The project involved their education on the importance of biodiversity, training in parataxonomy, forest inventory, biodiversity assessment, production of seedlings of indigenous forest trees, reforestation, ecorestoration, and forest protection. Groups of Aytas were given training in basic financial management in preparation for livelihood activities. Assertion of IP rights on their ancestral domain has led to increased employment of Aytas in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone. Earnings from fruit trees and other crops produced within the 227-hectare reservation and gathered from the forest have increased but the productivity remains low.

An assessment done in 2010 showed that in five years the earnings of Aytas have increased from \$0.47 to \$1.21 per day per person. Although the increase is a substantial improvement from the earnings of 2005 it barely reached the upper boundary of extreme poverty level in 2010. How can the development of the Magbukún Aytas in Kanawan be facilitated so they can rise from extreme poverty to moderate poverty and beyond? What measures, policies and guidelines can be set to ensure sustainability?

Study Site

Bataan is a second class province of Central Luzon, which occupies the whole of the Bataan Peninsula area(1373 km²; population: 662,153). It is bounded by Pampanga and Zambales in the north, the Manila Bay in the east, and the West Philippine Sea in the west. The peninsula is dominated by the Mariveles Mountains and the Bataan National Park that sits on the Mt. Natib mountain range.

On the northwest side of Bataan is Morong, a third class municipality with a population of >26,000 (NSO, 2010). The town has several beach resorts and a seaside leisure residential community. Its northwestern section is occupied by the Subic Bay Freeport Zone.



Figure 1. Map for the study site (Geocities)

The Kanawan Negritos Reservation Area (KNRA) is in Bgy. Binaritan, Morong. It occupies 227 hectares of land with a rolling plateau at about 100-200 meters above sea level (masl) and mountain slopes up to 400 masl. KNRA has small farms, orchards and forests (see Figure 1).

THE AYTA COMMUNITY

The Aytas of Kanawan belong to the Magbukún tribe of Negritos who are believed to be the first inhabitants of Morong, Bataan. As different groups of people came to settle in Morong, the Aytas who used to live along the shores of Morong were pushed higher and higher up the mountain slopes of the Mt. Natib mountain range. With the establishment of the Bataan National Park (BNP) in 1945, the government restricted their settlement to Sitio Lemon. However, the Aytas continued to move in and out to other sites in BNP during the dry season. In 1977 they were ejected from Sitio Lemon to give way to the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) that occupied 365 hectares of land in BNP. The Aytas dispersed to different locations in BNP for several years before settling together in Kanawan, a historically significant site for the Magbukún tribe. With the creation of BNP as a protected area, they were about to be ejected again from their settlement in 1987 but were rescued by a Presidential declaration establishing the 227-hectare Kanawan Negritos Reservation Area (KNRA).

Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices (IKSP) of Aytas

The Aytas consider themselves a part of nature and their life depends on the forest. They used to be semi-nomadic and depend mainly on hunting and gathering as a way-of-life. In temporary settlements in their ancestral domain, they tend swidden farms (kaingin) for a period of time until the soil is no longer fertile, then move on to another site near a water source where they burn the vegetation to make way for a new farm. The former kaingin site is left to fallow for many years until the land regains fertility and becomes suitable again for farming. In addition to the root crops, upland rice and vegetables from swidden farms, they gather wild fruits, root crops, ferns, herbs and edible flowers from the forest. They eat wild pig, wild chicken, and deer but they also hunt other birds, bats, monkeys, and monitor lizards (bayawak). Hunting wild pigs is usually done from June to December when the pigs are not mating. From the river, they catch fish and shrimp and gather snails along the banks. The Aytas cook rice and meat in bamboo tubes. When the Aytas gather food, they generally get only what they can eat for the day and if the catch is big, they share this with others or sell what remains to the lowland settlers in exchange for rice and other supplies.

In the temporary settlements, primitive houses made of bamboo, tree branches, rattan and dried leaves are built relatively far apart from each other around the swidden farm. When the



Aytas relocate, they usually leave almost everything on site and bring only important tools. They move from one temporary settlement to another but return to land previous farmed when these become fertile again. The ancestral domain and the reservation are owned by the community. They have assigned parcels of land to households in the reservation but the ownership remains communal.

Tradition is passed on orally and by example from one generation to another. The elders have a rich knowledge of traditional medicinal plants. The healing ceremony involves driving away bad spirits with dances and amulets (*pagkakagon*) and chants (*usú*) as the healers use plant parts and extracts as they attempt to cure the sick. They have elaborate ceremonies for weddings consisting of *panunuyo*, *pagsusundo*, *langu-langú* and *amba*. The dead are buried within or after a day and riddles are traded all throughout the night. The traditional way of embalming with santol bark and lime and the use of coffin made of the bark of lawaan tree is seldom practiced these days; they now make do with plywood coffins.

Hunting and honey gathering are done by men who try to get clues about location of bee colonies by observing the bee droppings on rocks and the direction of flight of bees from the river. They have a traditional system for gathering honey. Early in the honey season, the men mark trees with young colonies that can be gathered in the traditional manner only by those who marked the tree. However the traditional marks are not honored by informal settlers and may even serve as a giveaway sign for those who compete with the Aytas for honey. The Aytas know which leaves to use to smoke out bees from colonies and what part of the colonies to cut out for honey without disturbing the brooding chamber and the queen bee. Informal settlers unwittingly destroy bee colonies because they end up burning the colonies and killing the queen bees due to lack of knowledge in handling wild bees.

The Aytas have an intimate knowledge of the animals and trees of the forest. They know the flowering and fruiting schedules of trees but in recent years they have observed unusual schedule variations that they suspect are due to climate change. From the type and quantity of trees that flower they can predict how big the honey harvest will be. They know the different uses of plants and which seeds and plant parts animals eat. They can distinguish the sounds of birds and other animals and recognize animal track marks along the path. From the behavior of animals they can tell if outsiders are in the vicinity. At least one of the male elders can imitate birds and he has served as an invaluable forest guide for bird lovers and researchers.



Impact of the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) on BNP

The operation of PRPC from 1979 to 1994 attracted settlers from different parts of the Philippines particularly from Samar and the Bicol Region. At the height of the PRPC operation, it reached a peak population of over 21,000. According to the Aytas, prior to the operation of PRPC, the lower hills of Morong were covered with thick forest where monkeys, deer, and other wildlife abounded. However, informal settlers converted the lowland forest around BNP to farmlands to produce and sell crops to PRPC. In the late 80s as the PRPC operations wound down and eventually stopped in 1994, many informal settlers left a denuded land where yearly grassfires occur. Those who decided to remain in Morong now compete with Aytas for non-timber forest products. Due to overharvesting and destructive ways of gathering honey in what little remains of the forest, the number and size of bee colonies and the corresponding honey yield have decreased drastically in the past decade. Informal settlers make up the majority of those who are involved in illegal logging and those who cut the smaller trees for charcoal making, a destructive practice that prevents the growth of forest trees to maturity.

The Status of Aytas in 2005

The community of Aytas in Kanawan is extremely poor. A survey done in 2004-2005 showed that the Aytas got by at \$ 0.47 per day per person, a value way below the extreme poverty level of \$1.25 per day per person. The decrease and degradation of the forest cover have made their traditional livelihood of hunting and gathering unproductive. This is aggravated by competition for honey and wild animals with informal settlers. Most Aytas eat only once or twice a day, particularly during the lean months of June to September and the few Aytas employed in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone shared their rice and other food items with others in the community. The educational status was very low and the literacy rate among 95 Kanawan residents who were 15 years old and above was only 33%. In the same age group, only two were high school graduates and there was no college graduate. Likewise, the health status was very low. Data obtained from the municipal health worker showed that 49% of Kanawan children less than six years of age were underweight. The infant mortality rate (IMR) was 26 out of 185 or 141 per 1000 live births and the primary cause of death among infants was mainly lung infection. In comparison, the indigenous peoples residing in the Cordillera Mountains had an IMR of about 65 per 1000.



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE KANAWAN AYTA COMMUNITY

The political structure of Kanawan Aytas has three levels (DAR & NCIP, 2009):

- The highest decision making body is the Indigenous General Assembly (Katutubong Kapulungan, KK), which consists of legitimate Ayta residents of Kanawan who are 15 years old and above. Quorum is 60% of the community.
- The Council of Elders (Konsehong Matatanda, KM) consists of respected elders of the community who are over 45 years old and chosen based on credibility and wisdom. There is no definite number of members in the KM.
- The Tribal Council (Pamunuangng Tribo, PT) is the body that administers implements and regulates community affairs. Each of the eight clans of Kanawan has a representative in the PT who is screened by the KM.
 - PT is headed by a Tribal Chieftain (Tatang Gulang if male or Inang Gulang if female) who must be at least 25 years old. Minimum age for other members of the PT is 18 years. In addition to the Tribal Chieftain, officers include the Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor and Public Relations Officer. The term of office for members of the Tribal Council is three years with possible re-election for another term.
 - The committees that assist in the implementation of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) are in charge of the following: Peace & Order, Environment, Culture & Education, Agriculture, Livelihood, Infrastructure and Tourism.

The people's organization of the Aytas is registered in the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) as the *Samahannng mga Katutubong Negritosa Kanawan* (SAKANEKAN; Organization of Indigenous Negritos of Kanawan). Led by a Chairperson and a set of officers, SAKANEKAN takes care mainly of livelihood activities whereas the Tribal Council is in charge of matters concerning their communal land and the other affairs handled by committees of the Council as listed above.

A Free and Prior Informed Certificate (FPIC) is required for projects done with indigenous communities. FPIC is issued by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) after presentation of the project followed by a series of consultations and approval by the community.



However, the FPIC is not necessary if the community is the one that approaches an institution or organization for assistance on specific matters as confirmed by a community resolution.

Empowerment and Training in Forest Conservation

Empowerment of Aytas involved education and information campaign with respect to the importance of the forest and biodiversity conservation. The Indigenous People's Rights Act was translated into Tagalog by BB Motin then discussed extensively with the Aytas. Their education with respect to rights and responsibilities as a community of indigenous people was followed by guided discussions on how to preserve their cultural heritage that is closely intertwined with the conservation of the forest in their ancestral domain.

Subsequently, the Aytas actively participated in the formulation of a project under the Rural LINC Program of the Center for BioMolecular Science Foundation (CBMSF) to conserve the forest and establish sustainable means of livelihood. The project, supported by the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation (PTFCF), involved education of children and adults on the importance of biodiversity, training in parataxonomy, forest inventory, biodiversity assessment, production of seedlings of indigenous forest trees, reforestation, ecorestoration, and forest protection. They planted fruit trees such as cashew, bananas, and other crops and trained on Sloping Agriculture Land Technology (SALT). Groups of Aytas were also given training in basic financial management in preparation for livelihood activities such as ecotourism, agroforestry and vegetable farming.

Several initiatives to explore sustainable means of improving the economic status of Aytas have developed after the PTFCF-supported project ended. Among these was the IDRC supported project to explore the forestry carbon finance potential for the Aytas of Kanawan (Calderon et al. 2012).

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

There are a number of issues and concerns in engaging indigenous communities for designing, implementing, and evaluating sustainable development initiatives. Raising the economic status of Aytas from the extreme poverty level to moderate poverty level and



beyond is a big challenge. The survival of Magbukún Aytas and the preservation of their cultural heritage are closely intertwined with communal ownership of the Ayta ancestral domain and the conservation of forest ecosystems. Increasingly, the Magbukún Aytas try to diversify their livelihood activities via employment outside the reservation as they compete with intruders from the lowlands (“unats”) for forest products from their ancestral domain. The demand for charcoal by lowlanders, encourage informal settlers and Aytas to cut trees for charcoal making and threatens current reforestation and eco restoration efforts to reverse forest degradation. The transport of farm produce and non-timber forest products from Kanawan down the steep incline to the narrow Hanging Bridge to the paved road requires a big labor input. Moreover, adjusting from a barter economy to a monetary economy puts the Magbukún at a disadvantage particularly since almost all Ayta families do not know how to manage financial resources. The Magbukún tribe needs tribal leaders who are competent in facilitating participatory community decision-making, linking with development intermediaries, facilitating community collaboration and resolution of conflict, etc. Many development agencies and organizations with their own organizational missions and interests have engaged the Magbukún community with projects. How can the collective impact of development interventions from the outside by national and local government agencies, civic organizations, non-governmental organizations, and business groups (buyers of community produce) be purposively achieved? How can we measure the impact of development interventions for indigenous communities?

Discussion Questions

Question 1:

How do we gain entry into indigenous communities?

Working Session 1:

Consider these key points as part of discussion:

- a. acceptable behavioral norms for strangers and outsiders in meeting and interacting with indigenous people;
- b. importance of prior meetings with leaders, elders, and selected individuals;
- c. confidence-building actions or arrangements;
- d. avoidance and management of risks in the acquaintance phases of community engagement; and
- e. access to vital information and advice in gaining successful entry of external development actors into indigenous communities.



Question 2:

How do we learn and understand their socio-cultural (ethnic, history, traditions, practices, values), economic (livelihood), and political (leadership and governance) contexts?

Working session 2:

Consider these key points as part of discussion:

- a. access to information about the indigenous community before the actual initial visit;
- b. use of learning methods and effectiveness -- using field observation, participant observation, key informant interviews, and other methods;
- c. combination and sequence of learning methods; and
- d. assessment of your and the community's readiness for the engagement.

Question 3:

How can we engage them in formulating community development plans and programs?

Working Session 3:

Consider these key points as part of discussion:

- a. indigenous community's concept of "development";
- b. indigenous terms related to "development", and what do they say about the real meaning of development to the community members;
- c. your own concept of development;
- d. development goals or aspirations of the community;
- e. indigenous community and process of developing community goals and aspirations, plans and initiatives; and
- f. your contribution towards more effective and inclusive formulation of community development plans in indigenous communities.

Question 4:

What mechanism for assessing progress in sustainable community development can be designed and adopted by the indigenous community?

Working session 4:

Consider these key points as part of discussion:

- a. community development planning in the indigenous community: effectiveness and broad-based;
- b. assessment of progress towards or regression from goals;
- c. mechanisms to enhance the way the indigenous community assesses progress in achieving the goals of their sustainable community development plans;

- d. the acceptance, adoption, and ownership of these assessment mechanisms

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the Magbukún Aytas of Kanawan, the financial support of the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation (PTFCF) to the Center for BioMolecular Science Foundation (CBMSF) and the helpful discussions of colleagues at the University of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Manila University.

REFERENCES

Calderon MM, Bantayan NC, Pulhin FC & Cruz LJ 2013, 'Exploring the Forestry Carbon Finance Potential for an Indigenous Cultural Community in the Philippines', *Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia*, World Fish (ICLARM), Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines, viewed 2 November 2013, <http://www.eepsea.net>

DAR & NCIP 2009, *Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), Morong ARC, Morong, Bataan*, Department of Agrarian Reform, Quezon City, Philippines.

Motin BB, Cruz LJ, Gifford F & Kron MA 2006, 'A modified socio-cultural development index for the Aytas of Kanawan, Morong, Bataan, Philippines', *Indigenous Perspectives*, Tebtebba, Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, Baguio City, Philippines, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 51-71.

NSO 2010, *Census of population and housing: Total population by province, city, municipality and barangay: as of May 1, 2010*, National Statistics Office, Quezon City, Philippines, viewed 2 November 2013, <http://www.census.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/pressrelease/Central%20Luzon.pdf>

Philippine Maps, *Bataan National Park*, viewed 2 November 2013, http://www.geocities.ws/lakbay_gubat/images/map_bataan.gif