

HISTORY, GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND SURVIVING INDIGENOUS PRACTICES OF THE AETAS IN GUIMARAS ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the history, geographical distribution and surviving indigenous practices of the Aetas in Guimaras Island using mixed method in analyzing the results. A total of seven (7) communities was identified throughout Guimaras province. Majority of the places where the Aetas reside were owned by private individuals. Only a few were donated to the Aetas. Presently they believe in God and others were even baptized in Roman Catholic or Protestant religions. As to their way of courtship, they practice “pamalaye” wherein the man brings food to the house of the woman he wanted to marry and talk about his intention to marry the girl. If there is a consensus between the two parties, the wedding follows. However, there were some wherein parents are still practicing arranged marriages. During olden times, Aetas practice the traditional way of wedding wherein the ceremony is headed by the elders of the tribe or their parents. The Aetas of today hold their wedding in churches. Usually, they join a mass wedding. Aetas bury their dead in cemeteries. They also have access to health centers and hospitals for medical purposes. However, most of them are still practicing healing of illnesses/diseases by an albularyo (Quack Doctor) using herbal plants. The socio-demographic condition of the Aeta families showed that the household members numbered to 1-5 members and their houses have amenities and facilities comparable to common families in the non-Aeta communities. There is a need that indigenous practices of these Aetas be preserved and given proper attention by the government authorities.

Keywords: *Indigenous practices, Aeta Communities, geographical location, history, Guimaras*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In the Philippines, the Aetas or Aeta ancestors were the 'aboriginals' or the 'first' inhabitants of this Archipelago (Scott, 1984).

There are still a number of theories as to where the Ati originated from. Some anthropologists hypothesize they are descendants of New Guineans or Australian Aborigines, while others suggest that they came in a wave of migration from Ethiopia. What we do know is the Atis are genetically related to other negrito ethnic groups in the Philippines such as the Aeta of Luzon, the Batak of Palawan, the Agta of the Sierra Madres and the Mamanwa of Mindanao. The word “ati” is a corruption of the Visayan word “agta,” which literally means black (Maentz, 2016).

As early as 1903, Aeta was already dominating the different islands in the archipelago. According to Reed (1903) besides Luzon, the only large islands inhabited by them at present are Panay, Negros, Mindanao, and Paragua, but some of the smaller islands, as Tablas and Guimaras, have them. There is a small, wandering group of Negritos on Guimaras, probably emigrants from Panay. They have been reported from both Nagaba and Nueva Valencia, pueblos of that island. Investigation does not bear out the statements of the historian previously quoted in regard to the early populations of Negros.

Considering the time that Aeta has been observed in the different places in Panay and Guimaras island it is perceived that these communities may have still preserved the indigenous practices or cultures which were handed down to them by their elders. Modernity has helped to popularize, and at the same time threaten, indigeneity. Anthropologists question both the validity of the concept of indigeneity and the wisdom of employing it as a political tool, but they are reluctant to deny it to local communities, whose use

of the concept has become subject to study. The concept of indigenous knowledge is similarly faulted in favor of the hybrid products of modernity, and the idea of indigenous environmental knowledge and conservation is heatedly contested (Dove, 2006).

The rapid technological breakthroughs and the mainstreaming of the activities of many Aeta youths and the rest of the community, their indigenous practices and beliefs may have been clouded by the things that they have seen in their surroundings. Owing to all these premises it is endeavored by this research study to have a deep and thorough assessment of the indigenous practices of the Aeta community, have they retained or continued practicing them or not anymore especially in terms of their language, religion, burial and wake observance, and wedding practices. The dearth on the studies concerning this important indigenous group of the country necessitated the authors in doing this research work.

Objectives:

This study was conducted to determine the history, geographical distribution and surviving indigenous practices of the Aetas in Guimaras. Specifically this study aimed to (1) Determine the geographical location and the socio-demographic distribution of the different Aeta communities in Guimaras Island (2) Identify and determine surviving indigenous practices of the different communities in terms of: a) Language and knowledge of youths of the Inati language b) Religious beliefs and practices c) Arts and Recreation d) Clothing e) Livelihood and Food including preparation f) House construction g) Medical practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in the study was both descriptive and qualitative. The descriptive research design was used to gather data on the profile of the respondents and the socio-economic condition of the different households of the Aetas among the different communities in Guimaras province. However, for data on their wedding, religious, burial, clothing, language, and other cultural practices, the qualitative research design was used.

To gather the needed data, an interview guide and a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. The questions/items were submitted to a panel of jurors who were considered as experts in the field of research, testing, and assessment for review and modification. The comments, corrections, and suggestions of the panel of validators were considered in the preparation of the final draft before reliability testing. The researchers themselves were the one who conducted the interview so that they can further ask information which they feel necessary for the attainment of the objectives of the study. During the interview, the researchers translated the instrument into the dialect so that the Aetas will be able to understand what is being asked from them.

But prior to the actual data gathering, permits from the National Commission for the Indigenous People (NCIP) was secured. Permits from the LGUs Local Chief Executive and up to the barangay levels were all secured. During the actual interviews, snack foods were provided to the community people.

The respondents of the study were the household heads of the 117 families and the youths ages between 11-17 years old. The total enumeration was used in this study.

Statistical tools used for descriptive research design were frequency, percent, and ranking. Qualitative data were compared between and among communities with the aid of a matrix for logical analysis of data gathered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Geographical location of the Aeta communities in Guimaras Island. Fig.1 shows the location of the different Aeta communities in Guimaras Island. Only the municipality of San Lorenzo does not have any Aeta community. The rest of the municipalities; Buenavista, Jordan, Sibunag, and Nva. Valencia got Aeta communities. The Aeta community in the municipality of Buenavista is located in Sitio Serum Brgy. San Nicolas and Brgy. Magsaysay. The total households in Sitio serum were 28 while in Brgy. Magsaysay only 7 and some of them migrated from time to time into the coastal Barangay of Bacjao. This only shows that the migratory characteristics of some Aetas are still present. The huge population of the Aetas is found in Liningwan, Sibunag composed of 37 families, followed by the Kati-kati community in Jordan with 32 households. The households in Ubog, Nva. Valencia numbered only to 13.

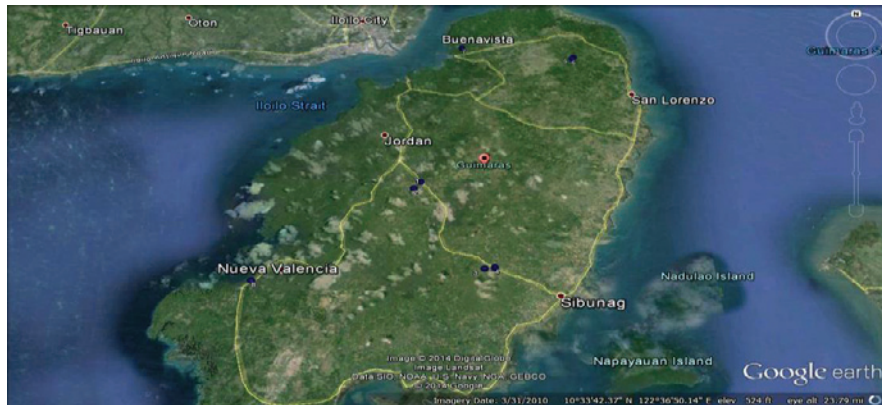


Fig 1.Location of the different Aeta Communities in Guimaras Island.

Socio-demographic Data of the Aeta Communities

Distribution of households per community. The distribution of the households of the Aeta community per location was determined. It was found out that the biggest community so far was in the municipality of Lininguan, Sibunag, Guimaras (37 or 31.6%). The reason for a bigger community compared to other municipalities maybe because the lands that they are occupying right now were already owned by the community which was acquired through the land distribution program of the Dept. of Agrarian Reform. This was followed by the community in Buenavista with a total of 35 households found in two communities namely Serum in San Nicolas and Brgy. Magsaysay. However, looking closely into the practices of the two communities, the one in Magsaysay was newly established. They are saying that they have just migrated from Iloilo province and were not fully settled yet in the place. They kept on transferring into other location. This group is somehow unruly and fond of drinking alcoholic drinks. They are already drunk even in the middle of the day. The group in Kati-Kati Jordan is also big with the total household population of 32 households (27.4%). The smallest group is found in Ubog, Nva. Valencia because they numbered only to 13 or 11.1%. The general observations of these communities showed that those families who were settled in the place for a long time have established permanent residences and their own households were fully established and a semblance of permanency can be felt.

Table 1. Distribution of Aeta households per community

Municipality	f	%
Jordan (Kati-Kati Community)	32	27.4
Buenavista:		
Magsaysay	7	6.0
Sitio Serum, San Nicolas	28	23.9
Sub-total	35	29.9
Nva. Valencia (Ubog Community)	13	11.1
Sibunag (Lininguan Community)	37	31.6
Total	117	100

Profile of the Aetas. The number of members in the Aeta household showed that majority have members ranging between 1-5 (71 or 60.7%), followed by those with members numbering between 6-10 individuals while only 2 households with members above 10 individuals. This simply shows that the households of the Aetas which perceived to be big because they seldom received services such as family planning but yet the majority have only 1-5 members. Segregating these numbers as to male and female, the majority of the households have an equal number of male versus females (82.1 and 82.5 %, respectively).

The data on the ages of the households of the Aeta communities in Guimaras Island showed that they have young household members. Many of them have ages ranging from 1-19 years old with a total number of 257 or 44.4%, followed by those with ages between 20-39 years which numbered to 164 or 28.3% while 100 or 17.3% have ages between 40-59 years old. The least was those infants or less than 1 year which totaled 15 or only 2.6% of the total population. This may mean that Aetas in Guimaras are consist of young generation when ages between 1-39 were combined the ensuing percentage was more than 70%. For some reasons these data may indicate that high mortality at an early age happens among the Aeta communities.

In terms of religion, most of the Aetas are already mainstreamed which means that they have imbibed the religion of the majority in the locality which is Catholicism. A total of 103 or (88%) households are Roman Catholics, followed by Baptist which numbered to 8 or 6.8%, Born Again with a total of 4 or 3.4% while one (1) or .9% for Adventist. This simply shows that our IPs are not anymore pagans which before they are commonly known.

It is interesting to note that among the total population of the Aetas in the different communities, they have college graduates among their group which numbered to 13 (2.7%) while a more higher number was able to attend college (34 or 7%). However, the majority of them (276 or 57%) were able to reach the elementary level only. This may imply that the Aeta communities in Guimaras province have already realized the importance of education for them. Although high school is also a free education in the country and yet many of them cannot afford to send their children in high schools the factor for this could be the distance of these schools from the community where they are living. Awareness among parents of the importance of education can also be gleaned from the fact that there are children attending the daycare or pre-school.

Table 2. Details of the Aeta household membership

Particulars	F	%
Number of household members:		
1-5	71	60.7
6-10	44	37.6
Above 10	2	1.7
Total	117	100.0
Number of males per household:		
1-3	96	82.1
4-5	20	17.1
More than 5	1	0.9
Total	117	100
Number of females per household:		
1-3	93	82.5
4-5	19	16.2
More than 5	4	3.4
None	1	0.9
Total	117	100
Ages of Aeta		
60 years old and above	43	7.4
40-59 years old	100	17.3
20-39 years old	164	28.3
1-19 years old	257	44.4
Infants (less than 1 year old)	15	2.6
Total	579	100.0
Religion		
Roman Catholic	103	88
Baptist	8	6.8
Born Again	4	3.4
Adventist	1	0.9
No response	1	0.9
Total	117	100
Educational Attainment		
Day care/Pre-School	21	4.3
Elementary level	276	57.0
Elementary graduate	29	6.0
High school level	73	15.1
High school graduate	29	6.0
College level	34	7.0
College graduate	13	2.7
ALS	2	0.4
No formal education	7	1.4
Total	484	100

Sources of Income of the household members of the Aeta communities. In terms of the source of income of the household heads, farming was the most predominant with 58 or 49.57% responses among the household heads, followed by those involved in weaving, handicraft making and carving (30 or 25.6%). These tallies with the article about Aetas which says that, Aetas are naturally skilled in weaving and plaiting. They produce excellent winnowing baskets, rattan hammocks, and other household containers like those works of Mamanuas. They also produce raincoats made of palm leaves with its bases surrounding the neck of the wearer, and topmost part spreads like a fan all around the body. However, only women exclusively weave winnows and mats and only men make armlets that are also great in charcoal making (Singlador, 2012). In the Ati communities in Guimaras weaving and handicraft making was one of the main sources of income of the Aeta families because these communities are trained by the NGOs' and other organizations in making handicrafts and other crafts to be sold in the different establishments in the locality. But a large number of the household heads worked as laborer (27 or 23.08%). Hunting was still

present although only a small number of the household head indicated such (12 or 10.26%). There are some who are into selling of herbal medicine, as well as being a barangay official or teacher. These results show that the involve heads are dependent upon what is available in the community.

Table 3. Source of income of the household heads (N=117)*

Source of Income	F	%	Rank
Weaving/carving/handicraft making	30	25.6	2
Farming	58	49.57	1
Construction	6	5.13	6.5
Selling herbal medicine	6	5.13	6.5
Making charcoal	20	17.09	4
Laborer	27	23.08	3
Driver	1	0.85	11
Guard	1	0.85	11
Sari sari store Operator	3	2.56	8.5
Hunting	12	10.26	5
Barangay official/teacher	3	5.13	8.5
Priest assistant	1	0.85	11

*Multiple responses

Owing to the scarcity of work and source of income for the Aeta families, 98.2% (115) of them have monthly income below P5,000.00. Only 3 individuals have indicated having monthly incomes ranging from P5,001-10,000; P10,001.00-15,000 and above P20,000.00, respectively.

In terms of the properties owned by the Aeta families many of them owned television sets (40.17%) but likewise many of them also do not own any household appliances or properties (35.04%). Looking into the items that some of the Aeta families have, it is noticeable that there are quite a number of them who have motorcycles, few households that have refrigerators, component, DVD players, and amplifier among others. This only shows that some Aeta families have enough income to acquire these properties or appliances which can offer them comfort and recreation. It also shows that the influence of the surrounding communities in the Aeta households is apparent.

Table 4. Household appliances/properties owned by the Aeta families in Guimaras Island(N=117)

Properties Owned by the Aeta Families*	F	%	Rank
Radio	27	23.08	3
Motorcycle	22	18.80	4
Sewing machine	1	0.85	12.5
TV	47	40.17	1
Refrigerator	3	2.56	9
DVD Player	8	6.84	5
Component	6	5.13	6
Speaker	2	1.71	10
Electric /ceiling fan	5	4.27	7
Karaoke	1	0.85	12.5
Tricycle	1	0.85	12.5
Amplifier	4	3.42	8
Sofa set	1	0.85	12.5
None	41	35.04	2

*Multiple responses

In terms of the amenities found in the households of the Aeta communities, 100% of them sourced their water for household use in dug well or artesian well. However, a few numbers of the households do get their water from the Local water districts, and some buy bottled water. The implication of such is that the lives of the Aeta in the province are slowly gearing toward mainstreaming as to the way of life of what the locals are practicing. This is understandable considering the hazards brought about by the availability of safe drinking water for the people. However, due to economic reasons everybody in the community also uses free water coming from the dug wells or artesian wells.

On the other hand, the majority of the Aeta families have a supply of electricity coming from the local electric cooperative (60.68%). But still many of them (39.32%) do not have electric power in their households.

In terms of the use of the toilet, 76.06% have flushed toilet, 12.83% are sharing with their neighbors but a good number (11.11%) are still using the open pit.

Table 5. Household amenities of the Aeta families (N=117)

Household Amenities/facilities	F	%
Source/s of Water*		
Dug Well/Artesian(Poso/balon)	117	100
Spring/steams	1	0.8
Local Water District	4	3.42
Purified water in Bottles	2	1.70
Availability of electrical supply:		
With electricity	71	60.68
Without Electricity	46	39.32
Total	117	100.00
Type of Toilet:		
Flush or Water sealed	89	76.06
Open Pit	13	11.11
Share with neighbors	15	12.83
Total	117	100.00

*Multiple responses

The Surviving Indigenous Practices of the Aeta Communities in Guimaras Island

Language and extent of use of the Inati language among the Aeta youths of Guimaras. The Aeta youths ages between 11-16 were asked on their extent of use the Inati language and their reply was seldom. This may show that they seldom use the language because they are already using the Ilonggo dialect which is the language of their surrounding communities. That is why their reply on the question do you use Inati language when talking to the people outside the Aeta community was sometimes. But when they with their peers and family members they always use the Inati language. These responses showed that the Inati language is only used when talking to their peers and family members.

This is a good sign that the Inati language will be not be forgotten among the younger generation of the Aetas because within their groups they still use this language.

Table 6. Extent of use of the Inati language among the Aeta youths (N=21)

Particulars	Mean	Interpretation
1. Do you often use the Inati language?	1.8	Sometimes
2. Do you use Inati language when conversing with your fellow Ati	2.3	Always
3. Do you use Inati language when talking to the people outside the community?	1.8	Sometimes
Overall Mean	1.96	Sometimes

Scale: 1-1.66 = Never; 1-67 = Sometimes 2.33-3.00 = Always Religious beliefs and practices

Religious beliefs and practices

Religion. Across seven (7) communities, the Aetas have already embraced the Roman Catholic faith, they go to Sunday masses and their children were baptized in the Roman Catholic church. No more animistic beliefs being practiced at present time. The animistic belief was part of the culture of the Aetas. It was mentioned by Singlador (2012) that, the Aetas are also animists. For example, the Pinatubo Aeta believes in environmental spirits such as the spirits of the river, sea, sky, mountain, hill, valley, and other places. The Ati of Negros Island calls their environmental spirits “taglugar” or “tagpuyo”, which literally means “inhabiting a place”. They also believe in spirits of disease and comfort. No special occasion is needed for the Aeta to pray, although there is a clear link between prayer and economic activities.

Marriage and courtship. It is still being practiced in the Aetas community. The “pagbagti” or a pre-wedding talk between parents are still done. The man’s family brings food to the house of the woman he wanted to marry and talk about his intention to marry the girl. If there is a consensus between the two parties, the wedding follows. In addition, the male suitor will serve the family of the woman before the wedding or right after the pagbagti. He does fetching of water, cutting of firewood and other household chores. However, there are some occasions wherein parents are still practicing arranged marriages. Before, the Aetas practice the traditional way of wedding wherein the ceremony is headed by the elders of the tribe or their parents. This ceremony was done whereby the couple encircles an ant hill, the man pursuing the woman and if the woman will be caught by the man they are already considered married. This is locally known as “libot-libot sa bungsod”. However, this practice is not done anymore. According to the elders, this was practiced because marriages between Aeta couples before were arranged by the parents. Thus, the tendency of the woman who is not in love with the man whom she is supposed to marry is to run away which took some time for the ceremony to conclude. But in other instances, wherein the couple to be married have feelings for each other, the woman will not run that fast, hence she will easily be caught by her supposed to be husband. The young Aeta couples today are married in the church.

Another practice which they called Sinulog, a dance ritual done during the marriage is not practiced anymore except in the Aeta community at Sibunag, Guimaras. The Sinulog dance is a skirmish of sharp bolo between relatives of the wedded couple.

In addition, the practice wherein the newlywed couple staying with the girl’s parents after the wedding is still done. The newly wedded couple stays with the girl’s parents until such time that they can build their own house.

Death and Burial practices. Out of the seven (7) Aeta communities, only two (2) communities bury the dead directly to the ground in their respective places using a bamboo coffin, but the rest uses the local cemeteries in the municipalities where their community is located. However, in olden times, they bury their dead within 24 hours but today they are already practices embalming of their dead’s. Before, they practice the ritual of “saving the soul of the dead”. Saving the soul is a ritual wherein they place the cadaver in a blanket. One person is holding one end of the blanket and another person is holding the other end. The elder will ask the cadaver” who killed you or what is the cause of your death?” Is it an aswang (witch), tamawo (fairy) or any other elementals? For example, If the supposed cause of death is “aswang”, the cadaver will become heavy and the heaviness will be confirmed by those holding both ends of the blanket. But if it not the reason, no heaviness can be felt. Thus, after confirming the cause of the death, they can

now make some rituals to save the soul of the departed relative. But saving the soul ritual is not practiced anymore at present times.

During the wake, they have to maintain a bonfire in the middle of the house or a lighted torch. This source of light should not be put off until such time that they have buried the dead. The reason for this is that they believed that the spirit of the dead is still around thus, he/she will have a light to guide his/her way. Among the seven communities (7) only four (4) practices “bordon”, a game played during the wake to keep the people doing the vigil awake at night. Bordon is a game wherein the teenagers of the community, both male and female will sit in a circular manner while holding the hands of each other. The leader or the game master will sit in the middle of the circle. He/she will give a ring to one of the players. This ring will be transferred from one hand to another secretly while the group is singing different Inati songs. Then the game master will suddenly stop the singing and whoever amongst the players will be caught with the ring in his/her hands she/he will be penalized. The penalty is similar to truth or consequence. The player who was caught will choose between truth and consequence. After obliging to this, the game will continue. Sometimes, the penalty is in the form of a Lowa or chant which rhymes.

Example of the lowa:

>Karay-a or Ilonggo Version

>>English Translation

>“Didto sa may bubon may nakita ako melon
 >>I saw a melon in a well
 >Bukot imo,bukot akon buroligan ta kaon”
 >>It is not yours, it is not mine, let us all eat this together
 >“Didto sa may dapog, may tawo nga naga loob”
 >>In the earthen stove, I saw a person
 >Pitkon ko anang itlog, daw lingganay katunog.”
 >>crouching, I stroke his testicles it sounded like a church bell.

Furthermore, when they were asked as to the common causes of death among them they answered hunger, old age, sickness, and overwork. This only shows the miserable condition of the indigenous people in the locality.

Arts and Recreation:

The members of the Aeta produces different types of handicrafts such as wallets, bracelets, cellphone holders, back scratcher, decorative made from coconut shells and nito or rattan vines. They are assisted by the different NGOs and private organizations by providing them trainings in production and weaving of these handicrafts. For their recreational activities, they said they are fond of singing accompanied by the guitar. They further said that they are the one who makes their own guitar. Another form of recreation for them is to go in the “lasang”, “lati”. Lasang or Lati refers to the forested area in the community where sometimes there is a small creek and they play by means of communing to nature. They also answered that they enjoy listening and telling stories. But with the advent of new technology, some of them answered that they too enjoyed listening to the music in the cellular phones.



Handicraft products of the Aeta community in Guimaras

Clothing. When the members of the Aeta communities were asked about their native clothing, they answered they have none. But before, they are using “Cheesecloth” for underwears and jute sacks as clothing. The mothers are the one sewing their clothes. Today they are just given their clothing and sometimes they buy their own clothing from the market.

Livelihood and the indigenous food including preparation. They mentioned that they do hunting, farming, charcoal making, broom making, handicrafts making and they still hunt for monitor lizard and tortoise (bao). These are their most favorite foods. They cooked these animals as adobo or with soup. They also cooked mixed vegetables coming from the garden. Other foods are bought in the market.

House construction. The houses of the Aetas in Guimaras province are very simple made from light materials taken from the forest or coconut plantation around them. They are the one constructing their own houses. Sometimes they are also helped by the members of their respective family members.



Houses of the Aeta in Guimaras province

Medical practices

Pregnancy and Birth. Before the mothers just go to the local hilot in the Aeta community but now they visit health centers for pre-natal examination. The medicines they are using are those provided in the health centers but before they use herbs taken from the forest. Four (4) out of seven (7) communities give birth in the centers or hospitals the rest at home with the help of hilot or the mother of the pregnant woman. Delivery at home is aided by the wooden pestle, earthen pots, banana leaves, sharpened Bagacay (Bamboo) and blankets to hold or support the expectant mother. Local drinks like albutra (combination of locally made alcoholic drink added with some herbs) are given to the mother after giving birth and other herbs to prevent post-partum ailments.

Before they don't register newly born babies but at present times they are required to register their newly born babies in the local civil registrar.

Members of the Aeta communities who suffer from ailments use both medicines coming from the Health centers or hospitals and the herbal medicines found in the forest area. The source of herbal medicines in the community are the quack doctors or locally known as "manugbulong". They are also Aeta who were trained before by their elders in the art of healing. They know the uses and characteristics of herbs or plants in the forest and their medicinal characteristics. Some communities still have albularyo but some go to the hospitals directly especially if they are near these facilities.

The Atis adopt the traditional healing system using indigenous knowledge. However, they would go to a hospital if they are not cured by herbal medicine. The community has fairly good access to the Barangay Health Center although there is neither a doctor or nurses who is regularly available but, a midwife and the Barangay Health Workers.

CONCLUSIONS

The distribution and settlements of the communities are dependent upon the availability of land provided to them. Their way of living is poor and their populations are affected because of hardships encountered in life. The surviving indigenous practices of the Aeta communities are slowly dying and the younger generation is already mainstreamed. The communities in Jordan and Nueva Valencia are the oldest communities in the whole island of Guimaras. With the help and assistance of the Government and other Private Sector through health seminars, livelihood projects, educational assistance and vocational trainings the community slowly adapting to livelihood of the new generations within the co. retain their traditional practices, such as their traditional healing system, inati languages, and some of their culture

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