



## NOMADS OF THE 21ST CENTURY: SURVIVAL AND FOOD SYSTEM AMONG THE ATI PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES

### NÓMADAS DEL SIGLO XXI: SUPERVIVENCIA Y SISTEMA ALIMENTARIO ENTRE LOS ATI DE FILIPINAS

### NÓMADAS DO SÉCULO XXI: SOBREVIVÊNCIA E SISTEMA ALIMENTAR ENTRE O POVO ATI DAS FILIPINAS

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper<sup>1</sup> describes the selected food-getting strategies by one of the marginal indigenous groups in the Philippines, the Ati people in Guimaras province. As a nomadic group in transition, it is of interest to identify their traditional way of collecting food in order to find ways how to offer meaningful intervention to them as people rightful to their own cultural identity. By assessing the viability of their basic support mechanisms to their food-getting activity, it becomes apparent the importance of land, access to rivers and streams, along the necessary legal recognitions and provisions to their lifeways.

*Keywords:* Indigenous peoples; traditional knowledge; food gathering behavior; right to ancestral domain; Ati people.

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## RESUMEN

Este artículo describe las estrategias de obtención de alimentos llevadas a cabo por uno de los grupos indígenas marginales de Filipinas, el pueblo Ati de la provincia de Guimaras. Como grupo nómada en transición, es interesante identificar su forma tradicional de recolectar alimentos para encontrar la forma de ofrecerles una intervención significativa como personas con derecho a su propia identidad cultural. Al evaluar la viabilidad de sus mecanismos básicos de apoyo a su actividad de obtención de alimentos se pone de manifiesto la importancia de la tierra, el acceso a ríos y arroyos, junto con los reconocimientos y disposiciones legales necesarios para su modo de vida.

*Palabras clave:* Pueblos indígenas, conocimientos tradicionales, recolección de alimentos, derecho al dominio ancestral, pueblo Ati.

## INTRODUCTION

Food is foundation to life, and access to it is undeniably important (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Super, 2002; National Geographic, 2024a). Compared to other animals, humans being with higher consciousness, have demonstrated their capacity to have a diversity in food gathering strategies all over the world based on each group's history, tradition, geography, and opportunity (Lee, 1992; Gutierrez, 2023). But the persistence of hunting and gathering is a confounding reality that in spite of the prevalence of material progress in this age, many still preferred their millennia-old lifestyle (IFAD, 2022). This behavioral pattern however is not universally the same, for each group likewise has shown their degree of adaptation and capacity to select among innovations or technologies according to whatever benefit them as a group (Kuhnlein, 2013). However, the capacity to select is simply overrated, for many indigenous peoples have been observed to be easily overwhelmed by the power of more sophisticated societies to which their communities are located, to dictate or if not to impose changes many of which subtle in their lives (FAO, 2024).

### *History and persistence of hunting and gathering*

Before the agricultural revolution that started at various areas of the world, like at the Fertile Crescent, the general community life was associated with hunting and gathering lifestyles (Zeder, 2024). This nomadic associated type of behavior of band societies was the successful adaptation to different regions of the globe by humans wherever they may be, at the desert, at the arctic, or at the tropical forests (Phillips, 2006; Rumney, 2011; National Geographic, 2024b). With agriculture, permanent settlements grew into cities and states reinforced by expanding economy based on land production and regularly dotted by large-scale warfare and genocide (Barkan, 2003). Exploration and colonization further accelerated human expansion, exploitation, subjugation of peripheral communities, that now we began to feel the global impact of this new mode of life that define the modern world and culture that is impacting not only the flora and fauna diversity but also conceived to expedite climate change (Hiller & Carlson, 2018; Brooke, 2014).

Meanwhile, at some states indigenous peoples gained precarious recognition of their rights and land but in many others, they easily succumbed to their dominant neighbor's greed and control (Survival International, 2010 & 2020; Heraclides, & Dialla, 2015). In other words, the perceived serene, contented, and joyful lives of the indigenous peoples are not symmetrical across the globe (Ember, 2020). The world over, literature abounds with

research and testimonies of the lives of indigenous peoples threatened, if not traumatized by dispossession, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, and state neglect (UNESCO, 2023). Their obstinacy to carry on their traditional habits, which are looked upon as archaic and a burden to society, puts them outside any government projects and programs (HRD Memorial, 2024). But since most of these people are in resource-rich lands, they are often the target of harassment, bribery, militarization, and abuse, if not victims of genocide (Espina, 2020; Delina, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020).

### *The hunting and gathering communities in the Philippines*

When the Spaniards arrived in the Philippines, there were already economically thriving communities across the region through maritime trade connections (Peterson, n. d.). This, however, does not negate the fact that at this early stage of cultural and societal evolution, there are still marked differences in food-seeking behavior in the country (Larena et al., 2021a and 2021b). First, there are agricultural producers in the north and south of the Philippines, like the Muslim-influenced tribes in Mindanao and the Ifugao people of Luzon, whose traditions allowed them to gain food and time surpluses that enabled them to develop literature, complex art and music, potteries, and other trade goods (Headland, 2010). Second, there are the horticultural communities that engaged in patch (swidden) gardening, which is not complex enough to produce surplus. However, they are open to the possibility of switching to farming at any time, given a certain amount of motivation or impetus (Peterson, n.d.). Lastly, there are the hunters and gatherers, who live in small bands with regular but limited contacts with the lowlanders, preferring their own age-old practice of exploiting the rich forest, rivers, and plains of the country (Eder, 1987).

Through the Spaniards' constant and persistent efforts to dominate the natives, they managed to persuade those farming and horticultural communities to come to terms with colonization through divide and conquer, intimidation, and reward systems (Constantino and Constantino, 2008). After more than 333 years of Spanish colonization, besides the Japanese interlude and the American political and economic overhaul, various traditional types of communities persisted, among which were the farming communities of the north and south of the country and the nomadic Ati people (Reid, 1994). One reason for the survival of these farming communities is that, because of their surplus and complex culture, they are able to keep armies of their own capable of resisting intrusion, enhancing further their pride and identity (Thompson, 2015; Harris,

1959). The Ati, on the other hand, lived materially, without anything to help them resist the colonizers. However, they managed to survive by evading the colonizers, demonstrating their resilience through flight, and maintaining relative autonomy in whatever plains they had settled in.

The Americans subsequently pacified the belligerent farming groups in the north and south of the Philippines through threats and massacres, while the hunting and gathering groups maintained their autonomous identity in small, dispersed bands across many islands of the country (Constantino and Constantino, 2008). Probably because they had nothing economically profitable among these latter groups except their contribution to exotic food and as academic objects of curiosity, the Americans simply allowed them to remain almost incognito (Campomanes, 2008). However, the succeeding post-colonial governments, in their zeal to create a homogenous population, replicated the colonizers' failure by neglecting to acknowledge and safeguard the inherent cultural differences of these small-scale cultural groups (Bodley, 2015). Eventually, the delay and constriction in their ancestral domain claim or recognition make assimilation no longer an option for them (Cultural Survival, 2010).

In summary, the three main broad food-gathering systems before colonization, which in part determined the current socio-political sphere of the country, are extensive farming (agriculturalist), semi-farming (horticulturalist), and hunting and gathering practices (nomadic). Given their intimate relationship to a life based on farming production, both extensive and semi-extensive farming groups have generally been able to survive well on the social transformations over time, while the majority of those involved in hunting and gathering now find themselves on the periphery of Philippine social and political life. So, as of today, the Ati people are, in a sense, survivors of colonial control but, at the same time, casualties of economic expansion based on land ownership.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to shed light on the vulnerability of the Ati people's existence by examining the viability of their food gathering techniques. This set of behaviors in procuring food is maintained here to go beyond their bodily needs, as each act is a product of their tradition, which is crucial in preserving their identity and culture. In this regard, each of their food gathering techniques is described and later evaluated based on its apparent viability as circumscribed by their current social condition as determined by their non-Ati neighbors.

To obtain data, regular visits have been done during weekends or at least twice a month starting in 2007, which allowed the performance of limited participant observation along with individual and group interviews, especially with the elders and key skilled members of the group. The long engagement with this group allowed the researcher to eventually fine-tune his data and understanding of Ati cultural life. Thus, after enumerating and describing the different food gathering techniques of the Ati below, the analysis is facilitated by evaluating the viability of each behavior based on access to land and its resources, as well as to different facets of educational, cultural, and legal support needs.

## RESULTS

### *The setting and their social-cultural atmosphere*

Guimaras is an island province found between Panay and Negros islands in the western part of the Visayas region of the Philippines. It is bounded mainly by the Sulu Sea on its western side and Iloilo Strait, Guimaras Trait, and Panay Gulf on its north and east sides (see coordinates: 10034'N, 122035'E) (PhilAtlas, 2023). It has a land area of 611.87 square kilometers and a total population of 187,842 as of 2020. With around 300 people per square kilometer, it is still considered the least populated province in Region VI, but with an annual population growth rate of 1.33 percent, the province's density is expected to bloom in the decades to come. As a province, it has five municipalities: Jordan, Buenavista, San Lorenzo, Nueva Valencia, and Sibunag.

As to the Ati people's cultural visibility, they are lucky enough to be included in the web page of the province, section 17 under the Social Services Category, just ahead over the last topic about poverty (Guimaras profile, 2018). This might be unintentional, but this shows the real position of the Ati people on the island: their less than 300 recorded households are minimal and declining. Given that their economic contribution is almost negative, this may put them as a liability to the province and so their integration and relation to the general populace are generally expressed in a passive modality. In other words, they are just around, probably something of an anomaly to the province's desired goals and wishes. In contrast however, there must be something in their existence that while they do not reap proportionate economic and social benefits, the province's put them in that webpage at the center stage, appearing gleeful and celebrating.

However, the texts narrated in the province’s web page is in contrast with the mood espoused in the print. The meager ten sentences devoted to the Ati probably is more than enough to appease the people who are supposed to live in resettlement areas. Nonetheless, the web page’s honesty must be recognized about the people who are still "in private lands, which they cannot call their own" (Guimaras profile, 2018). This idea of a resettlement is a problem in and of itself since, before the founding of the republic and of the province, they have been already existing in the region or in this wider archipelago. In this context, most likely what is happening to them today, is just an extended version of colonization in the local setting. Thus, at this age, it is always a mark of a prudent and humane society to keep its laws and rationality attuned to advance the dignity of all, which includes acceptance and tolerance of differences. This also reminds everyone that there is so much happiness that awaits everyone given the willingness of those in power to work out a society towards a healthy coexistence across history and cultural life.

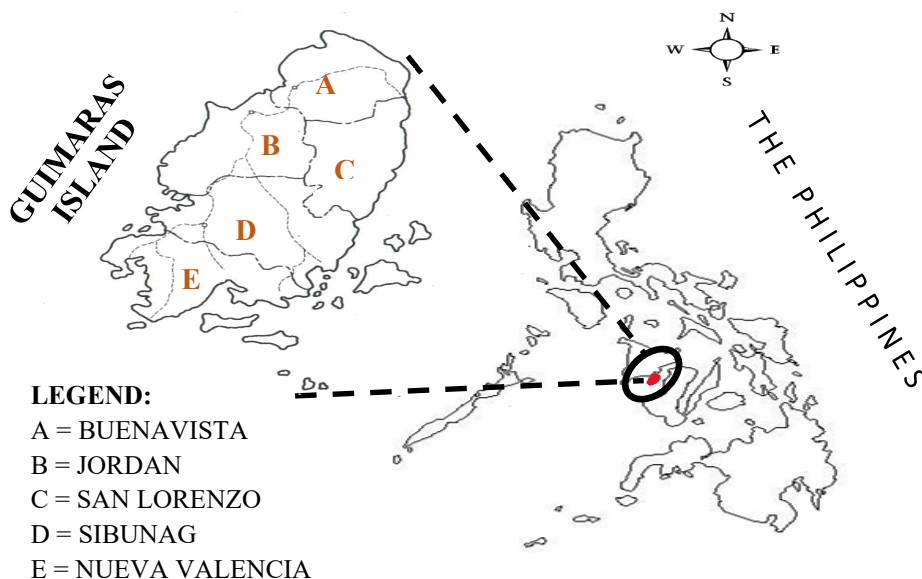


Figure 1. Map of Guimaras Island, Philippines

Probably without the inspiration and mechanism to accommodate the land question, the prevalent idea is to admit that the province has not identified any ancestral domain land for their remaining surviving indigenous people. However, in a separate government report, it is claimed that as much as 95 percent of the land area in Guimaras is alienable and disposable. The reluctance therefore to allow

the Ati to prevail in their autonomous claim of ancestral land is that much of these lands are reserved to private claimants, who, though they might have all the privilege of owning legal proofs yet have not tilled any piece of land in Guimaras.

This inability to resolve the land problem of the Ati people reflects the fate of almost all indigenous peoples of the world in as much as doing good to a displaced minority group may upset the general populace, who are in the mainstream of socioeconomic and political life of the country. This latter populace too had a share of suffering, poverty, and unemployment, and so the urgency could not just be raised with an indigenous group in respect to providing fair services to all. These concerns, however, should not be an obstacle but rather an opportunity to reconsider various options that could open a host of positive actions for the benefit of everyone.

The description further notes that besides poverty, there is among the Ati community a prevalence of school dropouts and malnutrition, as well as a lack of farming tools, a potable water supply, and personal hygiene. With all these, without any intervention, it is likely that these people, especially the children, will be locked in a cycle of discrimination, if not bullying. Further, the last paragraph devoted to the Ati reads, "Interventions for persons with disability and senior citizen are also given priority in the province" (Guimaras profile, 2018). Probably, this is an adjunct with the noble intention that there is an earnest effort to address the problems of the province, but with a mark of distinction by associating the problems of the Ati people close to a disability, and so intervention is required.

Looking at the common folks' experiences living outside the Ati resettlement area, the apparent ordinary habits of the rest do not merit any special treatment as a separate constituent of the province. In a sense, everyone around has a fair share of poverty, landlessness, and unemployment, and so it would be inconsistent that the Ati be given priority over those who are active in the socio-economic and political life of the province. The same goes within the minds of local leaders given their limited resources: they could not accommodate everyone. So, the best way forward is to keep the traditional connections and conventions of governance intact, which would keep the patronage of the electorate to preserve one's political life, being the source of income and family security. The most apparent question would likely then be: Why would not the Ati people strive like the rest of the community, given that all their grievances are similarly experienced by the rest? Why would they not discipline and educate themselves to become competitive individuals in the modern world, where they would likely be welcomed as victors?



These questions, besides assuming too much about economic comparative advantage, connote pitting the Ati against the rest and are so divisive. Besides, they too glossed over the continued historical and cultural trauma these once-foraging people are experiencing and so downplays their unique heritage and potential to determine their lives without antagonizing the larger society. There is actually no need to look any further to find a workable alternative for a meaningful development that accommodates the province's indigenous people's aspirations than to reread and reflect upon various United Nations principles and doctrines expressed in its Social Development Goals, the WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the International Labor Organization Convention No. 169, among others (UN DESA, 2015, 2023a & 2023b; WHO, 2021; ILO, 1989; UNDRIP, 2007).

### *Food-getting strategies viability*

For city dwellers, when one becomes hungry, one simply has to go to the grocery store or to open one's refrigerator, or to order for a food delivery using a mobile app. This can be done too by a handful of Ati people but as to their traditional mode of life and kept alive by many in their semi-autonomous dispersed communities, certain food-getting behavior are still observed that have intrinsic link to their self-identified lifestyle (Sansait, 2009). Below, they will be enumerated as well as to be given assessment in a tabulated form in order to identify the viability of the material and cultural bases that support each food-getting strategy. By doing this, it will directly highlight the needs of the Ati community and so specific interventions may be identified.

The main framework of this viability assessment is drawn from the idea that indigenous peoples like the Ati of Guimaras are among the groups of people experiencing various levels of risks to livelihood, culture, and identity which do not only need support but likewise appropriate information how such intervention could be carried out. Given that the Ati people are located in space and in time, or in other words, living under the hegemony of the Philippine government as well as partly determined by the historical trajectory of the country, their capacity to carry out their traditional obligations or conventions need likewise to be appraised. This is to indirectly inform the sustainability of their culture given the material and cultural opportunities as bases of their continued meaningful life.

The importance of this endeavor would keep the interest of policy makers and everyone else about the indigenous people's wellness grounded on

indicators that could later on be validated or tested. In this way, sincere efforts of the government or policy makers can have specific basis and so focus their plans on a specific steps manner that is sensitive to the experiences of the Ati people. Further, having a definite point or frame to start with, much time and money could be allocated well since judgements are better informed than before.

The variables and scope in this initial attempt to discuss the viability of the food-getting activity of the Ati people are far from complete and perfect, but their practical value in defining or describing conditions can fill in the academic and political knowledge gaps. In this sense, the analysis could help in explaining the risks, problems, and challenges that are faced by the Ati people through the described constrains they have in procuring their food. If at the end of the discussion a particular need could be well established or elicit interest that may influence or widen understanding and urgency to implement necessary actions or programs to these people, then the task has already made a good start.

### *Selected food-getting practices and analysis*

Below, each identified food-getting activity of the Ati people will be briefly described, and then in the next sub-topic, a table will be presented bearing these techniques along with the broad requirements in it to aid the analysis. This enumeration, categorization, and analysis of food-getting behavior can provide a comprehensive picture, potentially guiding future policies and highlighting the urgency of addressing the plight of the Ati people on Guimaras Island. These are neither discreet nor perfect categories; rather, they reflect the relevant concepts that are useful in assessing the viability or sustainability of the Ati food-getting system.

#### Pang-ranso

This is a generic form of finding food, for it involves families moving out in a new temporary location to hunt, to gather food, or at present, to look for temporary employment that could be supplemented by selling of their herbal/medicinal kits or by begging. *Pang-ranso* is an essential tradition to the Ati identity and history, for through it they have successfully survived up to the present. This behavior allowed them to disperse in a particular region, which in part mitigated any environmental stress to the surrounding area of their occupied territory through over-consumption and exploitation of resources. Likewise, this enabled them to open up new frontiers for their group to explore as well as create opportunities to gain new experiences and knowledge about their subsequent surroundings.

### Pang-ngayam

This is a well-specified food gathering behavior that aims mainly at obtaining protein by hunting or trapping animals in the wild. Since this involves a long walk and being away for at least three days, males (who are traditionally associated, although not exclusively, with this task) generally do have to make good judgment when to go as well as negotiate for each other's availability since many are now employed among the Uta (their dominant non-Ati neighbors). Although they do not have any preference as to the kind of species caught, they nonetheless are keen to hunt only those animals that are not perceived to be pregnant or still juvenile. Recently, however, they noticed that they become less selective with their kind of catch to compensate the length of the trek they have to do and the limited space available for them to exploit.

### Pang-limos

Commonly, begging is frowned upon as it indicates an unproductive state of life. As one puts himself in the position of being the object of embarrassment, disdain, or pity, it is seen as a social aberration. From the Uta's perspective, there is nothing unusual for Ati to beg, having defined and accepted that such behavior is corollary to their values and lifestyle. However, this behavior could be better appraised in the context of Ati history and practices rather than to appraise them as victims of economic disparity. This means that traditionally, their visits to their relatives to ask for food or their desire to establish exchange relations with the Uta are perfectly part of their traditional strategy of not only redistributing goods but also reinforcing social ties.

### Pamunit

This is their term for fishing in general and it involves the use of a hook and line attached to a long pole. Although many now use nylon string and iron hooks available in the market, however, in cases when these are not brought along, many are still capable of using any tree or plant fiber as their lines and a shaped and sharpened branch or bamboo as their hook. This activity is not discreet but rather it always includes other modes of obtaining sea or river products like the installation, the inspection and the collection a catch from bamboo traps, small seine, and bagnets.

### Panulo

Is their term for fishing at night using their improvised harpoons (iron-tipped poles) to catch fish that became visually disoriented due to the light coming from their powerful torchlights. While, recently, they claimed to have used illegal chemicals that stun fish, but nonetheless they are quick to maintain

that the Uta (the dominant lowlanders) were the ones who introduced these substances to them.

#### Pang-nginhas

This is a purposive collection of shells, snails, and crabs at the tidal zone (*sisi, bagungon, arikumo, talaba, suso, and kalampay*). Usually, this is done when they are close to or happen to visit the shore in conjunction with *pamunit*, or it may even supplant fishing in cases when their catch is few that day.

#### Pang-ngali

Although associated with diverse and abundant forest vegetation (which Guimaras is now losing), digging root crops is seen as truly a major means of acquiring starch or carbohydrates. On a given day, they would initially scour an area and look for the familiar vines indicative of root crops they consider edible. Then they would estimate the maturity and even the size of the tuber hidden beneath the soil by inspecting the size, length, and color of the vines and leaves relative to the soil type where the vine is found. The tuber is either "*rabo*" (ripe for cooking) or "*ganas*" (less starchy), and only the root crop that is *rabo* is pulled out and taken home while the rest are left for another week.

#### Pang-kaingin

This is a set of activities common among horticulturalists involve the preparation of the field and the planting of crops on it. It would usually happen during the dry season ("*tag-irinit*") that after having chosen a field due to the perceived fertility of the soil, shrubs and juvenile trees are felled ("*tapson ang gagmay nga kahoy*"). Then, after the debris has been collected ("*tumpukon*") and left for at least a week to dry further, it will be burned ("*tutdan*"). Once the leaves and branches have been burned, planting ("*panggas*") would start with the use of a digging stick. Species recalled as being planted include rice, corn, beans, potatoes, and cassava.

#### Pang-uling

Charcoal making entails the existence of a strong demand for its production and is thus generally associated with the Uta community, who are predisposed to cook a host of menus and delicacies. This task, therefore, for the Ati partially defines his venture into an economic relationship, for it involves a payment by the Uta for the labor he had invested. On their own, the Ati have no inclination to get into the charcoal-making enterprise except when commissioned (or "*kung suguon lang*") by the Uta. The Ati, out of the task assigned or contracted to him, will receive two-thirds of the earnings ("*tersya ang parte*").

### Pang-buhat Habon-habon

This category is purely an economic enterprise, for they are now tied to a contract to produce a native purse handicraft. After having been provided with initial training by a religious organization (in Kati-kati) and having been given capital by sales agents who have contact with them, they are now made to respond to the market demand for their produce. For many, in order to have food on their table or kerosene on their lamp, they have to obtain credit from their neighbor, who expects a payment upon the next visit of a sales agent, who would grant them additional capital to stimulate further production.

### Pang-trabaho o Pang-nguma sa Bisaya

Being paid laborers in a household or on the farm of their Uta neighbors is held as another means to obtain food, though indirectly. This is not only plain work for a pay since the contact usually results in the Ati learning the values and expectations of their masters. Oftentimes, they would receive, uncalled for prejudicial remarks as “itum,” “baho,” or “tamad” (black, smelly, or lazy) by their neighbor, but over time they were able to live by or ignore them and so able to move ahead with their life.

### *Viability assessment of food-getting behavior*

Table 1 summarizes important key issues and requirements so that the Ati food-getting behavior can be sustainably meaningful in their lives. The first section focuses on the material requirements, which are essential to the food-gathering activity. Without them, no activity can function or become sustainable. The next group of variables addresses the availability of support necessary for the successful execution of the food-gathering activity. Meanwhile, the final grouping highlights the challenges policymakers and future researchers may face in providing effective intervention mechanisms. This means that given certain attention to land, to training, to legal, cultural, and educational supports as well as to their need for self-governing autonomous organization, they would likely be empowered enough to celebrate their existence in the country. Likewise, all these could not happen without sufficient information dissemination to their neighboring communities the specific life and needs of their indigenous neighbor.

In the Table, the cells are color-coded so as to efficiently convey whether a particular need in a column is to what extent significant to a particular food-getting behavior listed in rows. The green color signifies the high demand that could be land, access to water, to legal provisions, or to some other

requirements for a particular food-getting activity. The blue one is for moderate demand, which means that it would be good that interventions can be provided but not as critically needed as those in green ones. Meanwhile the gray ones are for those activities that because they have no specific connections with a particular support need, thus, they are simply not required.

As nostalgic and as desired, pang-ranso basically needs an available land where they could keep their age-old cultural pattern, which in part could explain their dispersal and their held memories of some places their elders held. Such land is not anything that is simply provided by anyone else, for their ecological and cultural knowledge likewise play an important role as criteria in the selection. In the current land ownership pattern in the Philippines, the difficulty of finding available land for them to explore is outright none since the lowlanders or their Uta (non-Ati agriculture-based) neighbors have almost acquired legal claims to most of the lands.

What is required in carrying out this task is a core of 1 to 3 families that, after some time, once one has scouted a favorable site, would simply inform the rest of their plans ahead and later on move to the site. Positive reasons include a sense of excitement about a new site and the economic opportunities found, while negative reasons include the desire to split from an already emotionally, ecologically, and economically constrained community. With this orientation, while land may not be available yet, many are still willing and want a newer location to venture out.

Culturally, or on their readiness to carry out this moving out, is identified as being limited given that only a few had previous experience with it, and the negative reasons have become more prevalent than positive ones. Likewise, as to the interest of each to participate, it would be seasonal since, little by little, the Ati are involved in many contractual labors or employment with the Uta that often constrained them to carry out their own community traditional needs. Thus, the issues or challenges posited are the legal framework, cultural education, group organization, and information dissemination.

As regards the legal framework, the state still has to demonstrate its seriousness in dealing with the rights of the indigenous peoples who are living in a precarious situation, which requires a different approach than what the larger community values or prefers. In this regard, a legislated policy would be a welcome reality that would allow the Ati people to identify a larger zone where they could continually practice their traditional lifestyle. Second is the need to provide a wider and more meaningful education to the Ati people, for, given the current context, they need to be empowered by being able to

reinforce and articulate their identities through the experiences of other indigenous peoples in the country and in other regions of the world.

Table 1. Food-getting behavior and list of requirements

List of Requirements								
	Material support			Performance support		Non-material support		
Type of Food-getting Activities	Enjoyment to land	Access to rivers and creeks	Access to coastal zones	Training	Industry Tools	Legal, Cultural, and Educational Supports	Self-organization	Information Dissemination
<i>Pang-ranso</i>	Highly	Highly	Highly	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-</i>	Highly	Highly	Highly	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-limos</i>	Not	Not	Not	Not	Not	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-</i>	Not	Highly	Highly	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-</i>	Not	Highly	Highly	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-</i>	Not	Highly	Highly	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-ngali</i>	Highly	Not	Not	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-</i>	Highly	Not	Not	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-uling</i>	Highly	Not	Not	Mode	Mode	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-buhat</i>	Not	Not	Not	Highly	Highly	Highly	Highly	Highly
<i>Pang-panarbaho</i>	Highly require	Not requir	Not requir	Highly requir	Mode rately	Highly required	Highly required	Highly required

Group organization support means they must be assisted in organizing themselves at least within their own level and capacity in order to have proper representation in the wider world as well as make efficient the flow of

information and responsibilities in their communities. This group organizing might take so long and may require a series of workshops, but they are necessary as part of their structural reorientation in order to have legal and cultural representation across the region and states. Lastly, information dissemination involves the integration of knowledge and appreciation of the Ati people across the non-Ati people, who, though distinct and vulnerable, have the full potential to contribute to the cultural and historical make-up of the country.

So far in their own situation, the only agency that is most familiar to them is the National Commission on the Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), which is under the Office of the President. This agency has the mandate to work out for the needs of the indigenous peoples of the region which from an ordinary Ati person, it is seen more of as a bureaucratic office constrained by the whim of the President. It would be more meaningful, if the Ati themselves be allowed to form their own community grown associations free from the interference of any agency so that on their own they may be able to increase their autonomy especially in decision making. This can only happen if funding as well be provided and to be assisted by non-government organizations with trustworthy records among the Ati. This creation of a people's organization by and for the Ati people, even how crucial it is, still remains a profound challenge to the group.

In pang-ngayam, the most basic need is the availability of land, and given the diversity of the flora and fauna, the favored animals hunted will always be available. Although there are no more mammals to pursue, like the forest pigs and deer, the act of going out, exploring, and observing nature reconnects them to their traditional values and allows them to regain some form of satisfaction and confidence in life. As of the moment, the zones available for them to exploit are getting limited since most of the land is now privately owned.

While there are people excited to go with the group, as often as not, it is limited given that only a few times a year or a month, they deem that these hunted animals are available. Similar to pang-ranso, pang-ngayam necessitates a sustainable legal framework, cultural education, group organization, and effective information dissemination.

For pang-limos, since this term sounds derogatory as it connotes outright begging, it is often substituted with another term such as to trade, to visit the city, or to just find luck somewhere. Finding luck or even a little kindness is all they need in times of drought, but still, they see to it that they have something



to offer in the form of traditional products they might bring along. The material elements they bring along may be limited given their limited capacity to carry them, the number of materials their neighbors could entrust to them, and the lack of reliable contacts or resources that they are going to meet or find. As regards the human and cultural requirements, it is undoubtedly understood that while many are available, it is still seasonal and that it is limited to experience as well. But as regards their willingness to connect with the kindness of the general populace, they have learned how to manage trust, distance, and kindness when soliciting food, money, or selling a few home products they have.

The legal framework of this might conflict with the anti-mendicancy law of the local government, yet certain provisions could be established, such as allowing them to have a clean, fully maintained, respectable place to sell their products and at the same time introduce their lives. Along with this, cultural education is important so that they may become more aware of their role and contribution to the diversity of life in other parts of the province, which could be ensured if they have developed an autonomous organization.

This self-organization is quite difficult to attain since, most often, their organization is dependent on their sponsors, such that their practice of self-determination is always weak. In this scenario, they truly need intervention so that they could have some degree of political voice reflective of their own interests and not from the dictate of any officials coming from the government office. Lastly, information dissemination is likewise identified as important, with the same end that both the Ati and the non-Ati will form a respectable and informed interaction.

As regards pamunit, rivers and creeks are not only getting less accessible since much of the paths leading to them are fenced off. Likewise, due to the expansion of local populations along their infrastructure projects, rivers and creeks are observed to have some altered microsystems due to leaching of chemicals and sedimentation. Still, the negative effects of climate change cannot be discounted either.

It is seasonal work, and since the act itself is satisfying, people will always be willing to go, given their availability. Given their unique tradition, a legal framework suitable to their lives could be accommodated, but this becomes irrelevant if they have no guaranteed land to use. Similarly, noting that their lives are closely tied to nature, additional cultural and ecological education would be of help, which could be sustained if they have a locally governed self-organization. Lastly, information dissemination will certainly lessen prejudice

and allow other locals to understand the importance of an ecologically sustainable lifestyle, as exemplified by the Ati.

Panulo is a more aggressive way of hunting fish and reptiles at night, for they make use of torchlights or lanterns with high- lights, yet since this is seasonal, the intensity of its effect on the targeted species would be minimal. The legal framework and cultural and ecological education would be relevant, along with the formation of an autonomous organization and extending education to their neighbors.

Panginhas is different from pamunit and panulo since this activity happens in an aquatic environment, yet each task requires a different time frame or group of people, which means they cannot be done simultaneously. Access to this area is now becoming difficult since much of the pathways are blocked by fences. Similar to other food challenges, this too requires a legal framework along with their cultural and ecological education, which could be sustained by reinforcing their identity through group organization and information dissemination to their neighbors.

Since carbohydrates are important in any diet, pang-ngali is almost part of their daily imagination every time they feel hungry. Since not all could be dug out in the same place and at the same time, this simply requires a secondary forest or a patch of land where some tubers and vines could grow to maturity. Likewise, as in previous food-getting behaviors, the issues or challenges they face are the lack of legal structures, cultural and educational interventions, group organization, and information dissemination that could ensure the sustainability of this activity.

Pang-kaingin is a very important food-gathering strategy with a long-term goal, which is to make the land available for their horticultural or semi-farming activities. It is not to destroy the forest but to make other edible fruits and plants available to the community, which could even potentially add to forest diversification. To this end, land availability is important, along with legal support, and cultural and ecological education that are fit to them, to be further sustained by group organization and information dissemination.

Pang-uling, on the other hand, could be said to be a recent activity but is still considered part of their food-getting activity. The charcoal, as the output of their labor, could be exchanged for money or food. This arduous and hazardous activity could easily be associated with them since they are more familiar with the trees and the terrain. If there is any legal framework, it certainly must work along cultural and ecological lines, given that the cutting of trees may be associated with suppression of forest regrowth and that the

burning could produce unnecessary carbon in the atmosphere. Nonetheless, group organization could be of help since it could help them find wider support to do other fulfilling work. Similarly, continued information dissemination could enable the local population to maintain greater appreciation and support for their endeavor.

Although this might refer to a form of handicraft, it nonetheless could represent the Ati's desire to participate in the wider market. In a closer look, these people have a deep knowledge of working with native products, from construction to their daily lives, which makes them feel at ease preparing the materials and weaving handicrafts. It is a miniscule cottage industry, for it is simply not even a family affair but just open to anybody with interest and time, given the demand advanced on them. Males, too, were observed to do wood carvings. On the whole, they simply need support in the form of training, tools, and capital, besides ensuring that they have an organized group of their own and access to a wider market.

Lastly, as regards labor, or through pang-panarabaho o pang-nguma, they are all eager bodies willing to contribute for pay. However, as regards quality, performance, and reliance, there are some issues given that they are used to their traditional lifestyle, where community life rather than personal interest prevails. This creates less demand for them given that they are not used to the competitive and hourly job. While it is cited here that provisions of tools could be of help, it is still preferred that they be given the privilege of being free from the dictates of the capitalist settled society, which could happen only if they are given recognition for their ancestral domain claim. This claim could not happen without first organizing them, and on their own, they may increase their awareness and confidence to articulate and negotiate their interests. On the education side, their plight could be a good topic for how people could become sensitive to differences in lifestyles and not make ignorance an excuse to harbor prejudice toward the Ati people.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper presented a number of food-getting behavior of the Ati people of Guimaras province, Philippines which reflect their long tradition as a nomadic group and now in transition to a settled community. The diversity shows their built-in mechanism to become resilient through which by adhering to these activities they are able to transmit and to reinforce such their learned tradition and culture. While these are inherently associated with their nomadic lifestyle, yet it is prejudicial to say that these are ancient or incongruent to the

current world for humanity's survival does not rest on singular mode of living but on diversity. Their current affirmation of these food-getting lifestyle shows that everything is well given their autonomy and access to land which through favorable legislation and subsequent education dissemination could be realized. Their current condition today however, being settled in a parceled small piece of land, without their full prior informed consent coming from their autonomous decision reveal how much is being neglected among the indigenous rights and cultural welfare of the country. While change may be inevitable, it is hoped that it is not due to restriction or imposition of one's culture over another, but through mutual respect and accommodation as guaranteed by the constitution and the world recognized laws on indigenous peoples. Thus, it is raised here that specific laws need to be provided to them that support and protect their dignity and traditional cultural expression which could be sustained by recognizing their intimacy to land. These efforts in practice could be realized through ensuring the integrity of their own organized association or group, provide educational support, and information dissemination to their neighboring communities.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this study the community might be seen as an isolated and singular entity, as this is a chosen point of view in order to have a focused discussion, yet it should be understood that in reality their life and experiences are dynamically linked with the bigger societies and with the other Ati communities in other provinces of the region. Second, there might be other food-getting categories that are not enumerated or identified, but nonetheless, it is hoped that the ones presented here are comprehensive enough to warrant seriousness about the need of the Ati people to keep their traditional cultural habit be recognized and enhanced. Third, it might appear that the data are not the recent ones, and criticism like this should be welcomed as a challenge to future researchers, although as to experiences of the Ati people, the regularity of their life has almost been imperceptibly the same for some decades now. Fourth, the lack of sufficient funding that may allow for a comprehensive empirical detail has kept the data at a minimum, yet as this study would show, whatever data obtained, they still led to a fruitful analysis. Meanwhile, the review or feedback of the informants obtained was limited to the verification of the raw data obtained only and has not been extended to the analysis. Lastly, the analysis here is to be held from the researchers' point of view, and so it is hoped that future researchers may fill this need.

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