



Pasbul Aeta Community Rehabilitation: Faith in Action

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“You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18).

Life in the mountain is such an easy and peaceful lifestyle. Being one with nature most of the time, everyday living is pampered with natural blessings from creation. Our Aeta brothers and sisters were resettled in the midway slope of the mountains located in Barangay Camias, Porac, Pampanga after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991. They used to enjoy the natural resources that brought them heaven on earth. Most of their houses were made of cogon and

bamboo with a concrete base, and farming in the vast lands provided them their livelihood and brought daily food on their *hapagkainan* (dining table). The stream at the foot of the mountains was their source of water and enjoyment for most children. These were once real in the life of the three Aeta tribes, namely the Cuyucot, Liplip, and Patal. But everything changed after the earthquake that hit them on April 22, 2019.

Now we find the Aeta community in Pasbul living in an open field. Nobody wants to enter their affected houses after the earthquake since they fear that any day tremors will come again and



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will cause the houses to totally collapse on them. Today, nothing is left of their farms because of the landslides. There are no more root crops, vegetables and fruits that they used to enjoy and even sell. Every individual member of the community has a sad story to tell about this unexpected turn of situation brought about by the dreadful earthquake.

Pasbul community now faces the challenge of returning to their decent and healthy living with their indigenous culture intact and flourishing. It is the only community now in Porac, Pampanga whose members are one hundred percent indigenous. This is why the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena (Philippines) have taken the challenge to organize a program towards community rehabilitation with full consideration of the Aetas' unique indigenous cultural heritage; this includes the process of enhancing their way of living and empowering the entire community to participate in all aspects of their life, with threefold plan that would secure the reintegration of decent and adequate living. The ABAKADA approach has been adopted to implement the programs: *Ambagan*, *BAyanihan*, *KAtuwang*, *DAgdag-kabuhayan*.

Bahay (House). To help them have a house of their own, good for five family members we need to donate and deliver (*Ambagan*) materials needed, as well as gather a workforce (*BAyanihan*) among the

community members and other volunteers (architects and engineers) to participate in the construction of these houses. Very importantly, the beneficiaries themselves need to be guided and inspired to help build their own houses, value and own these themselves. Hebrews 3:4 states, “Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.” We rest our faith that God will pave the way for His children, the less fortunate Aetas, to have their own place that they can call home. It is our hope that the Pasbul community will thrive again and live normally according to God's will. It is our love that shall bind us all together in this one great endeavor to share our blessings generously with them.

Paaralan (School). This indigenous educational program partners (*KAtuwang*) with different educational institutions for sponsorship (volunteers from among the teachers and the students) for continued integral education towards personal and communal progress, reinforcement, and development of indigenous educational models and systems that will enhance their culture.

Educating the Aetas has always been a challenge for institutions who would like to promote learning competencies and educational standards among the indigenous peoples. A good number of Aeta children are found to drop out of school due to lack of interest and motivation in school. When non-government organizations

started helping Pasbul back in the 1990s, education was the primary assistance provided for them upon the request of the elders. In 1992, the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena, together with other groups, responded to this request. Since then, basic education has been offered to the community of Pasbul where everything was free of charge.

Siena College of Quezon City provided for the building of the school, the teachers, instruction materials and school supplies. Through the years many graduated from Siena College Extension Mission School (SC-EMS) in Pasbul and most of them continued to pursue high school education, either in the public or private schools which are run by the Dominican Sisters. Some of them had the opportunity to persevere and finish college. A number of them graduated from college and took Bachelor in Education.

The dream of the youth and children of the community to continue their schooling was momentarily affected by the change of status of the school that used to help them. But now, a community school has been registered to establish their own indigenous educational institution where indigenous professional teachers themselves are running and fulfilling the dream of the young Aetas for the first time in history.

Inspired by the peace-loving community of Aetas, Pasbul Aeta Community Integrated School or PACIS (meaning peace) was established in 2019. The community school addresses the needs of Aeta children in acquiring education that focuses on indigenous knowledge, models, methods, and content within formal and non-formal learning systems. We are a learning institution established within the Aeta community offering traditional and indigenous skills according to their environment and culture. We have designed our instruction materials sensitive to the cultural and educational needs of Aeta pupils. Our holistic approach caters to physical, intellectual, spiritual and cultural aspect of every student. All teachers are Aetas themselves who can motivate Aeta children to be at their best.

It is the intention of PACIS to provide a learning environment appropriate to the culture of the Aeta community. Its core values are peace, productivity, teamwork and integrity of creation. These are aligned to the values that are *maka-Diyos*, *maka-tao*, *maka-pamayanan*, *at maka-kalikasan*. It nurtures self-worth and determination among the pupils as well as the entire community who are involved in the upbringing of the Aeta youth. It aims to bring out all the potentials of every Aeta in order to participate in the development of their community as well as that of the country. Since





PACIS is supported by different non-government organizations (NGOs), there is no collection of fees from students.

Tawid-Buhay (Livelihoods). Since their livelihood is limited now, the program aims to explore possible livelihood other than farming that suits their culture and capacities. Thus, there is the need to provide livelihood program (*Dagdag-kabuhayan*) towards a sustainable and effective growth of the community as a whole, providing them with sufficient capital and/or materials and skills to start a new source for daily needs. This is where livelihood training, small scale or home business, and marketing local products enter their lives.

Daily life sustenance is a critical issue to them these days. There are regular feedings. Food baskets, clothes and personal hygiene gift packs are provided now and then. They themselves continue to fight and survive by making the most of what they have. They do backyard gardening, charcoal making or leave their families and work in the lowlands.

To integrate all these programs, personal visits to the community are greatly needed. This

is for the community to socially interact with the rest of the people who reach out to them. Towards this end we need to gather pledges that will help in keeping them healthy physically, mentally and spiritually, and organize regular community assemblies where they can enhance their cultural and educational growth.

Every being is created by God and each one is a blessing for each other. There is no room for discrimination, and it is justice that enables us to share God's blessings. This is our faith and it is faith that prompts action. The ministry for the Aetas is faith that is the realization of what is hoped for. What is faith without works? It is because of our love of God that we love our Aeta brothers and sisters.

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