

Poly sci final paper



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Final Paper Washington State University PoliticalScience418 Fall 2012

Section 1 Professor Robert Quinlan December 6, 2012 Introduction This paper is written almost exclusively with information taken directly from the book Families of the Forest by Alan Johnson about the lifestyle of the Matsigenka Amazonian Natives. Information regarding the Matsigenka is almost solely derived from the work of Johnson unless noted otherwise. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Matsigenka people, their needs as a community and finally pose a development project that meets the needs described.

Realistically this is only one possible solution posed by an inexperienced undergraduate student. The author is student who has never set foot in South America or even has had any experience with a development project. The ideas expressed in this work are purely an academic exercise. The author does not assume that the Matsigenka do not already know and or practice some of the ideas shared in this assignment. Overview of the Matsigenka The Matsigenka, a native people of the Amazon Basin, live in what Johnson describes as an “angular landscape, along river valleys surrounded by forested mountains”.

The Matsigenka have a peripheral environment on the outside edge of conquest lands. They originally settled in to a as a bid to avoid conflicts with other groups. The land is not ideal but good enough to live on while not ever being sought as territory for annexation by other groups. They are very isolated and their living choice has the consequence scarcity. Many of the best crops, fish, and game are not as bountiful as they are in other areas.

They have plenty of land for their type of farming and their small population means they do not compete between themselves for resources.

Their settlements are small and spread far apart. (Johnson) To understand the Matsigenka they must be seen in their own unique context of their daily lives. As with any parent, the task of raising a child is to raise them to be able to live in the world on their own one day. For the Matsigenka this means raising children who will become accustomed to living in their own nuclear family and thrive while in relative isolation. (Johnson) The Matsigenka's ability to be independent and desire to remain independent has been disheartening to missionaries and some schoolteachers.

Attempts at organizing and building communities have largely been failures. The Matsigenka are happy to be free from directions and rules that stem from a missionary or any other persons attempt to convert or normalize them. (Johnson) From the very beginning their upbringing determines who they are as a people. From the start the emphasis on independence is apparent. No one is invited or comes to visit when a child is born. At birth a newborn is left alone on a mat while the mother is attended to. After a few minutes, the baby is then bathed with hot water causing discomfort making it cry. (Johnson) The procedure is done to strengthen the child for the hard independent life to come. The Matsigenka parents test the child's limits, expecting more and more self-reliance at an early age. In the home, mothers commonly tether toddlers to a stake keeping them from wandering into danger. The method is no more a cruel "leash" than a baby gate used in American homes could be considered a cruel cage. (Johnson) Tethering

allows the child freedom and independence without the danger of physical harm. The Matsigenka's diet is varied and extensive.

Their types of food production are farming, fishing, hunting, and foraging with some small use of domesticated animals. They can eat anything from raw foods found anywhere in their environment or eat feasts involving days of preparation. The people eat insect larvae of many bugs all during the year as source of dietary fats and protein. Larger game birds, monkeys, peccary, and tapir are the favorites. Farming small gardens is the most important to them making up more than half of their food. Foraging and fishing can often time produce disappointing results.

Snakes are taboo and never eaten. (Johnson) Their diet poses no issues for them. For crops the people grow manioc (cassava), maize (corn), bananas, plantains, rice and coffee. Coffee has been introduced recently by outsiders as a cash crop. Along with trying to build communities the crop was meant to bring indigenous peoples into contact and trade with the modern parts of Peru. Coffee was seen as way to introduce money into the Matsigenka system. (Johnson) Their farming methods are sufficient to sustain them and the land they work on. The most important fish in the Matsigenka diet is shima. (Johnson) These fish get up to 20 inches long and can weigh over 2 pounds. They are bottom feeders caught by net fishing. Mamori are similar in size to shima and caught with a regular hook and line setup. Rock dwelling fish like etari who are caught by hand. Along with other species such as shrimp and kempiti caught in traps fit into their diverse diet. Large fish species of omani, kayunaro and charava are rarely caught. (Johnson) Domesticated animals

are not overly significant to a family. Families typically raise a couple of chickens and ducks.

They are allowed to forage around the house during the day, feeding on insects considered pests like ants and sometimes are given maize. At night they are kept in chicken coops tended to by the children. (Johnson) As a people, the Matsigenka are very adaptive and catch all kinds of fish in many different ways. The Matsigenka do not participate in the market economy. Attempts to get them to raise cash crops and begin to participate have been implemented by outsiders. (Johnson) They make nearly all of the material goods used in daily life. However they do not make knives, aluminum pots or other metal items.

As men and women they learn complementary manufacturing skills allowing them self-sufficiency. Matsigenka can survive in long-term isolation as a nuclear family with the skills in fishing, farming and hunting in the manner they prefer. (Johnson) The Matsigenka are adaptive, and independent. Needs and resource assessment based on the ethnographic description The Matsigenka have good nutrition and housing but they still have barriers to good overall health. The problems they have are not their fault. As a people they do everything they can like maintain standards of cleanliness, and treat illness with medicines they have available.

The problems arise from limited resources and knowledge. (Johnson) For hygiene the Matsigenka clean themselves, their homes, and their clothing daily. Even when they sit on the earthen floor of their home they use a woven mat. (Johnson) They wash their hand before preparing food and are careful with waste. Baths are taken daily and garbage is thrown out in a

separate area away from the home. The Matsigenka find human waste disgusting along with animal waste and believe according to Johnson that “The evil odor of feces is believed to invade the body and cause illness”(436)

Families try to locate homes next to mountain streams to ensure a water supply uncontaminated by humans. (Johnson) Mountain streams, dry up seasonally forcing people back to the river for water where they are re-infected by water borne parasites. (Rainforest) Research has shown that the debilitating infections are colds, conjunctivitis, and parasites. Colds and conjunctivitis hit the community in waves. Epidemics move rapidly through the population. Tribal memories still exist of when the white man's influenza that killed many. The people stay away from everyone and the schools when sickness hits.

One of the most common greetings used by members is to ascertain if someone returning is sick and to be avoided. (Johnson) Johnson notes that researchers others who stayed with the Matsigenks stated: Most health complaints came to our attention because the medicines we had with us were believed to be more effective than Matsigenka remedies. Our house became a center where people would stop to tell us their symptoms and ask for treatment. They were pragmatic about accepting this help, seeing illness and injury as more or less naturally occurring. 436) When a family member becomes ill they are left to lie on a mat in their home while the rest of the family ignores the sick person. The Matsigenka believe sickness is life-threatening and feel a sick person is dangerous and best left alone. (Johnson) Johnson describes the Matsigenka as a mixed picture of health: They have an ample diet and are energetic and supple, capable of great feats of

athleticism and endurance. They are attractive, maintain personal standards of cleanliness, and attend to their health needs with an array of remedies.

On the other hand, they live with parasite loads that weaken them and probably contribute to many infant deaths, they are subject to viral and bacterial infections that periodically sweep their hamlets and incapacitate them putting food production at risk... Despite the beauty of nature surrounding them and their freedom to set their own work agenda, theirs is a hard life evident in the virtual absence of elderly people. (439) A needs and resource assessment based on the ethnographic description provided by Johnson would indicate a few key items.

Health education, medical aid, improvements in sanitation, and clean drinking water are the most pressing needs. These could be possibly met using a culturally sensitive and responsible means of service delivery. Development project that meets one or more of the needs described Any project design must take into consideration the unique culture of the people it seeks to help Johnson notes in a prominent way that there is family level of sociocultural integration not a community one and the Matsigenka cannot be understood or appreciated except as a family level society.

Meaning, as a group they are not " tropical-forest villagers" or " tribal peoples" like most amateur sociologists may picture. Unlike other groups they do not participate in suprafamily, raiding and warfare, structured gift exchange, or even large group feasting. (Johnson) Concepts like a family reunion or organizing a militia to defend their land are completely foreign to their way of life. Johnson notes it is extremely difficult to get them to

participate in any group activity. They will listen to and directions but will walk away and refuse to join the proposed group activity.

Matsigenka are not amenable to being directed or led. Education or works projects from other regions cannot be rolled out in a cookie cutter fashion to help them. Understanding their independence and determination does not mean that the Matsigenka are closed to change. In the 1980 and 1970's sierra farmers came to the mountain valleys to live next to Matsigenka families. The new farmers have brought infrastructural development that was welcomed by the Matsigenka people. They created school communities where boys, and girls, playsoccer, study and do homework.

Radios that can be found now are a sign of the integration of culture from the larger world around them. (Johnson) Most effective long term projects rely on ownership and the pride of the people they seek to help. Pride in ownership translates into maintenance and care of the public works project after the NGO who sets it up leaves. Johnson explains the idea of shintaro "owner" if we think of it not as legal title to objects like land or trees, but as a form of respect for the individual. Any project must transfer respect as ownership to achieve long term sustainability.

Recently in the last 15 years money has been dumped into projects that have failed and been abandoned. (Fraser) It is not enough to just build something and leave. The best way to help might be to model what the rainforest flow project has done and pay special attention to some cultural factors. Any project should consider how ownership is considered, how the people operate as a family level society, the aversion to group activities, and

being told what to do. The project should capitalize on their strong sense of hygiene and build on their dislike of human waste.

The Matsigenka already intrinsically know about the importance of clean water and washing hands. The leap from understanding clean water and increasing the effectiveness of existing sanitation procedures should be an accomplishable task if executed sensitively. Hygiene education and health services As a people they are very pragmatic, adaptable and have demonstrated a belief in better westernized medicine when dealing with researchers in the past. (Johnson) Setting up clinics may not be the answer since they will avoid any area where they may go and become sick.

The clinic will need to come to the sick, not the other way around. Travelling to and helping sick family members on sleeping on mats in the home will strengthen any belief in stronger westernized medicine. The process will loosen the hold of traditional beliefs in bad spirits having an influence on outcomes. Health education can effectively be delivered using the existing school system and reinforced when educators visit with health professionals providing mobile medical clinic visits. (Rainforest) Previously efforts were made to do similar projects but the participants only spoke Spanish not the native language.

To eliminate the language barrier it will be key that the health professionals and educators are fluent in the native language. Workers will need to understand cultural norms of the Matsigenka. (Rainforest) Special consideration should be given to immunization programs. Immunizations can make the people feel sick afterward and may scare participants off. Postponing immunizations until a trust relationship has been built up may be

necessary. Credibility may be required for families to believe they are not being made sick after a flu shot or pertussis vaccination. Sanitation

The Matsigenka already believe in finding the freshest water. Health education should teach how to defecate away from any water source and bury it when in the forest. The disdain they have for waste and how they conduct life around their home makes them receptive. Composting latrines with hand washing facilities may be built near schools but attention should be given to ventilation and odor control (Rainforest) considering “ The evil odor of feces is believed to invade the body and cause illness”. (Johnson 436) Drinking water projects Delivering clean safe drinking water is of paramount importance to the Matsigenka, or any community.

Rainforest Flow has used with self-reported success, for several years, a specific setup that uses low tech sand filtration. The method removes 99.9 percent of bacteria from drinking water and uses a low tech gravitational flow. The systems are setup to support modest community growth and are maintained by a usage fee charged to every home water is delivered to. (Rainforest) In conclusion there are many projects that can possibly help the Matsigenka. The purpose of this paper was to introduce the Matsigenka people, their needs as a community and pose a development project that meets their needs sensitively.

Like any group, assistance must be provided to them on their terms for it to be accepted. References Fraser, B. (2012, May 25). Machiguenga communities could be affected by peru gas production. Retrieved from Johnson, A. (2003). Families of the forest the matsigenka indians of the peruvian amazon. University of California Press. Retrieved from [http://www.](http://www.https://assignbuster.com/poly-sci-final-paper/)

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