Through the artistry and skill of these women, abaca (Manila hemp) fibres undergo their final transformation into hinabol, the traditional fabric of the Higaonon, a mountain tribe, in Bukidnon. The NTFP-Task Force and CustomMade Crafts Center in Manila has strengthened ties with its partner communities to improve the quality of their crafts and more critically, link them with markets for their products. The special pricing scheme places value on artisans’ designs, cultural significance, and environmental aspects of production.

[This photo is among those taken in the documentation Mangangabol Ta Mintapod: Hinabol Weavers of Mintapod published through the NTFP-TF. For details or to get a copy, please visit the publications section of www.ntfp.org]
Strengthening the crafts enterprises of indigenous communities

By BENG RONQUILLO-CAMBA
NTFP-Task Force/CustomMade Crafts Center, The Philippines

The most creative gathering happened as 29 leaders, indigenous peoples and rural artisans from all over the country and in some parts of Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Cambodia) gathered together to talk about the one thing that tickles their creative minds: handicrafts.

A new dimension of the handicrafts enterprise in the Philippines was discussed as the third National Crafts Conference organised by the NTFP Task Force commenced last 18-20 October 2006 in Manila. With the theme Bridging Culture and Commerce 2006: Strengthening the Crafts Enterprises of Indigenous Communities, the conference had the following aims:

- To cultivate the interest of the participants to engage in the handicrafts business by sharing successful models of indigenous groups and by showing them the opportunities and threats faced by the industry; and
- To strengthen the indigenous crafts groups by preparing them to face the realities of engaging in the indigenous crafts business in the areas of production, marketing and others, by providing them with the perspective of an entrepreneur and by developing the capacities of their leaders who will guide the members in strengthening their enterprise.

Each day of the conference held a unique surprise of its own. The first day was graced by recognised leaders in the handicrafts industry who served as speakers discussing the Crafts Enterprises. The topics that were tackled were the following: crafts production and marketing as an enterprise; the handicrafts industry and responding to market needs and opportunities. At the end of the day, the participants’ readiness was gauged. Most of the participants raised issues of financial...
The year comes to a busy close as this extra-full issue of Voices features the flurry of activity in NTFP-related work.

Handicrafts, particularly ones made from NTFPs such as rattan, bamboo or various fibres, often are an important livelihood for many of the communities our partner organisations work with. For our cover story, Beng Camba of the NTFP-TF/CustomMade Crafts Center recaps the learnings of this year’s crafts conference in Manila. It is encouraging that more peoples organisations and community members have joined this annual event.

The event also attracted participants from Malaysia and Cambodia, injecting it with some regional flavour. Sarim Heang, of the newly formed Cambodian NGO aptly called CAN-DO, returned home brimming with learnings (p. 7) and eager to start work on their own rattan and bamboo crafts program.

Rex dela Pena, working on crafts development with Mangyan communities in the Philippines, shares his thoughts on how “trading partnerships” are bringing about positive social and environmental changes through a slow yet sure process (p. 14).

In Bastar district, India, Madhu Ramnath (LeAF) shares the innovative concept of the mahua bank, breaking a vicious cycle with unscrupulous middlemen (p. 8). Through these banks, control over mahua, a flower made into a drink and used for social and religious occasions, is reclaimed by the adivasis.

A bigger picture of the India governance system is presented by Nabaghan Ojha of RCDC. He recommends options for strengthening forest-based livelihoods, pointing out that the most viable option is building up the capacity of the Gram Panchayat, or village councils, which play a critical role in NTFP management and trade.

More exciting news comes our way with the Philippine-designed rattan bed of Brad Pitt, the first- designer rattan bed of Brad Pitt, the first-ever Bee and Honey Museum in India, and the Virtual Academy (pp. 10-11).

Let’s give a warm welcome to Caroline “Peachy” Ongleo, our new Programme Manager for the NTFP-EP secretariat. And here’s to what undoubtedly will be an even more fruitful 2007 for all of us!

- Aloisa Zamora-Santos

The NTFP-EP Secretariat • Jenne de Beer, Executive Director Maria Cristina S. Guerrero, Deputy Director Caroline Ongleo-Mabanua, Programme Manager Joanna de Rozario, Regional Facilitator for Malaysia and Indonesia Aloisa Zamora-Santos, Information Management Officer Vince Michael Docta, Resource Mobilisation Officer

Editorial

resources, raw materials and human resources management as the top three concerns in their priority list.

Meanwhile, the second day featured a different approach of learning through a Structured Learning Experience (SLE) that featured the handicrafts industry. The participants got a taste, feel and glimpse of what it feels like to engage in the handicrafts business through a mock business center where they negotiated with buyers (both foreign and local), lenders, suppliers and production crew.

Since day two was all about managing and leading the crafts enterprise, the following were the topics discussed during the day: the knowledge and skills needed to run and manage the crafts enterprise, lectures on leading the enterprise, and entrepreneurial organisation. At the end of the day, the participants played another game, which allowed them to get expert advice on issues such as Business Development and System, Merging Commerce and Culture and Marketing Development. Issues on originality, competition and organising business systems were brought up and discussed.

But nothing beats the participants’ experience on the third day. That was the day when they got the special treat to go out and expand their horizons through a study tour! The participants visited the then ongoing Manila FAME International exhibit where they saw various handicrafts in cutting-edge designs, unconventional shapes and trendy colors. The participants’ minds were challenged to think out of the box and create original handicrafts of their own.

Equipped with new information and fueled by a surge of enthusiasm, the handicrafts leaders went back to their communities filled with a burning passion to share their knowledge and to start working on their crafts. Surely, the rest of the surprise for the Philippine handicrafts industry is yet to unravel.
From Palawan to the DENR: documenting & evaluating traditional NTFP management

In May, the community of Daan, Aporawan, Palawan, Philippines through the NATRIPAL (United Tribes of Palawan), hosted the NTFP Task Force’s field workshop on documenting and evaluating traditional methods of NTFP harvesting and management. It focused on three NTFPs – almaciga resin, rattan, and honey – resources which were held in common among these groups.

The workshop was a follow-through of Dr. Mary Stockdale’s January visit, recommending a field test of the manual she authored *Steps to Sustainable and Community-based NTFP Management*. Dr. Stockdale is part of the NTFP-EP’s Virtual Academy.

Alongside the workshop, photo-video documentation was undertaken. NTFP Task Force partners gained insights from Dr. Jon Corbett of the University of Victoria, Canada on the use of multi-media tools for documentation. An immediate output of the of the trip was a short film *Mensahe Mula sa Kagubatan* (“Message from the Forest”).

The film became a springboard for advocacy on community-friendly policies on the access and use of the said resources. It was presented to policymakers of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Forest Management Bureau on 8 June and to academicians and researchers at the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, University of the Philippines at Los Banos on 9 June. The presentation contributed to an opportunity to present a broader NTFP policy agenda to the DENR (see article “Brad Pitts’ bed and Brazilian Honey,” p. 11).

Multi-media for community advocacy

The power of multi-media as a vehicle for community advocacy was discussed by two experts within the EP network last June 2. Dr. Jon Corbett (left) of the University of Victoria, Canada shared his experiences using participatory multi-media approaches for community information systems in Dayak tribes in Indonesia and for language revitalisation in First Nations in Canada. He emphasised the importance of the process that engages the community, given that participatory multimedia aims to enhance community capacity in generating, managing and communicating information and ultimately to encourage positive social change.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ridzki Sigit (right) of Telapak discussed how they use film and what he terms as “development media” as a critical tool in investigating and monitoring issues in natural resource management. He presented a hard-hitting expose *The Last Frontier* of illegal logging of merbau in Papua, Indonesia. His crew posed as buyers of illegal logs, prompting discussion on the watchdog function of media and issues of security.

The forum was a sharing experience of similar work – advocacy-wise or media-wise – across various groups who joined the forum.

P3R artisans study tour on crafts

In July, a study tour was organised for six members of the artisans group of P3R (Association of Rattan Farmers and Craft Makers of Kedang Pahu, East Kalimantan). The journey brought the group to Bali, Jogyakarta and Jakarta, with the aim of studying the market for craft items in said locations. The study tour was rounded off with a workshop, organised by Dian Niaga, in Jakarta.

The latter meeting brought together people with both their feet in the trade, including a participant from Singapore, individuals with a background in design and techniques, as well as Nola Andaya of the CustomMade Crafts Center (CMCC) in Manila.

Not much later, a follow-up visit was made by Ibu Sylvia of PT Pilus, accompanied by EP craft support coordinator Indonesia, Yoga Sofyar and design specialist Ibu Aty of Dian Tama (Pontianak), to Kedang Pahu in order to discuss designs, prices and possible volumes.

Since then, P3R has received firm orders from Pt Pilus and Bali-based ‘Threads for Life,’ while others have expressed interest in purchasing items from this source at a later date.

The initiative was made possible through support from NC-IUCN.
Sweet News from Indonesia

The Forest Honey Network Indonesia (Jaringan Madu Hutan Indonesia or JMHI) is steadily expanding, with most recently a honey cooperative from Sumbawa joining the fold. BioCert is on track with — a first — the organic certification of honey from Danau Sentarum, which is expected to be finalised immediately after the next harvest in the lake area, around February 2007.

A major launch in Indonesia of JMHI’s line of forest honeys has been postponed for April 2007. All efforts are at this stage focused on improving harvesting techniques, as well as at getting more sites at a higher quality level.

Activities for 2006 culminated in the annual network meeting, this time hosted by the Kendari-based NGO Yascita and held in the village of Alahaa, Southeast Sulawesi. The timing was good, as the event took place right in the middle of the harvesting season. Alahaa’s forest is very well preserved and contains vast honey resources. It turned out that the village cooperative has made tremendous progress since last year’s meeting, both in harvesting practices and proper handling of the product. Therefore, the village has been selected by BioCert to be the next in line for certification.

Furthermore, the group from Riau showed its new flower designs for bees wax candles.

Keystone’s technical advisor, ‘Pak Leo,’ captured his audience with elaborate lectures on bee biology and demonstrations of testing and processing techniques. Leo is scheduled to be back in Indonesia next year.

Finally, Johnny Utama’s (of JMHI marketing arm Dian Niaga) much detailed explanations on such issues as pricing and costing, were also well received.

The meeting was rounded off with the participation of JMHI in a one-hour talk show ‘Bale-Bale’ on Yashita’s Kendari TV.

Preparing implements using locally available materials for another honey harvest. It will be used for smoking out the bees.

A New Decade for the Indigenous World: International Day of Indigenous Peoples (August 9)

In solidarity and support of the over 370 million indigenous people worldwide, 11 Philippine indigenous peoples groups — exhibited their achievements in assuring respect for their rights, cultural identity and development — through cultural performances and sales of indigenous products at the Edsa Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Metro Manila.

These organizations were the following: Earth Rights/Peoples Rights, Natripal, Lumad Development Center, Ilawan’s Tugdaan, Upland Development Programme, Cordillera People’s Alliance, Tebtebba Foundation, Agmihicu, Bakun Indigenous Tribe Organization, Malupa and Kalahan Educational Foundation.

A cultural exhibition “A New Decade for the Indigenous World” also ran for a week.

The successful event, with over 100 in attendance, was a collaborative effort of the Delegation of the European Commission to the Philippines, the Embassy of Canada, International Labor Organization, Shangri-La Plaza Mall, and the NTFP-EP.

Of Philippine crafts and natural products

From 3-5 October, the Philippine NTFP-Task Force’s Crissy Guerrero attended the USAID/FRAME Natural Products Workshop. It aimed to strengthen value chains to become more effective mechanisms for addressing poverty reduction and conservation goals. This workshop builds on the existing knowledge sharing network for the natural resource community (www.frameweb.org).

Ms. Guerrero presented in the panel on Natural Products and the Distribution of Rural Benefits. She discussed how the CustomMade Crafts Center was developed as a mechanism to address the need for ongoing product development and marketing support for indigenous crafts. She highlighted the project’s benefits, including economic, as well as the questions arising with regards to benefit sharing and externalities.

The workshop was attended by over 100 persons from various sectors including the private sector (AVEDA, natural beauty care, products specialist; and S&D Aroma, distributor of fairly traded, FSC certified essential oils, etc.), researchers (CIFOR, Penn State University, Harvard University, Overseas Development Institute, etc.), government, NGOs (Conservation International, Enterprise Works Worldwide, Asian Network for Sustainable Agriculture & Bioresources), and community enterprises from different countries such as Malawi, Madagascar, Nepal, Senegal and the Philippines, among others.
Ecological monitoring workshop for NTFPs in India

Last 23-26 November, Keystone organised the Ecological Monitoring Workshop for NTFPs at Masinagudi Post, the Nilgiris, India. Some 34 representatives from India partners (EcoNet, Legal and Environmental Action Forum, Prakruti, and the Regional Centre for Development Corporation), convened for an orientation on practical steps to sustainable and community-based NTFP management from Dr. Mary Stockdale, a tropical forest expert from Canada and a member of the Virtual Academy of NTFP-EP.

The workshop aimed at understanding sustainable management practices of the major NTFPs in the states of Chattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu. Emphasis was given to a range of options on NTFP harvesting and management involving both local and scientific approaches, participatory monitoring and how these can be relevant to the participants’ own context.

Participants viewed two films produced through the NTFP-EP – “Message from the Forest” and “Eaglewood.” Participants also got the chance to appreciate nature through an exposure trip to the Madumalai Wildlife Sanctuary.

The semi-annual planning meeting of EP partners in India took place immediately after the workshop.

Advocating against forest conversion & plantation establishment at ASEAN parallel summit this December

The 2nd ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC) will be held 10-12 December in Cebu City, Philippines coinciding with the annual ASEAN Summit. The conference seeks to consolidate and strengthen the advocacy of civil society of Southeast Asian countries to the ministerial level. This meeting will also include the the participation of the ASEAN secretariat as well as the Eminent Persons Group (the group of respected individuals mandated by ASEAN to draft the ASEAN charter). Apart from tackling a broad range of priority issues affecting ASEAN this will also be an opportunity for civil society to prepare a declaration to ASEAN.

NTFP-EP sits in the ACSC panel on “Revisiting the Regional Commons” which looks into transboundary issues such as natural resource use and environment. The EP, along with Indonesian partners Sawit Watch and WWF-Indonesia, are using this panel specifically and the conference in general to discuss the concerns related to forest conversion, plantation establishment, and transboundary haze. It is also an opportunity to engage with ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASEOEN). ASEOEN is contemplating on institutionalizing a permanent civil society forum that the ministers would regularly engage with on environmental issues. The event will draw international press thus bringing greater attention to the statements and advocacy of civil society.

The attendance of Sawit Watch, World Wide Fund for Nature-Indonesia, and NTFP-EP is supported by the Nature and Poverty (N&P) Programme of Netherlands Committee-IUCN, Friends of the Earth-NL and WWF-NL.

Get your 365 days of NTFPs!

Our just-released poster-calendar puts the spotlight on the spectrum of NTFPs that have been the focus of NTFP-EP’s work. With interesting trivia on the people that rely on these NTFPs, and their economic, social and cultural significance. Our thanks to the contributors of the all-original photos, some of which have graced the pages of Voices from the Forest. Contact us at info@ntfp.org for a copy.
Woke up in Cambodia, get up and move towards crafts development

By SARIM HEANG, CAN-DO, Cambodia

It was a great opportunity for us, on behalf of our indigenous peoples, to join the invaluable 3rd Crafts Conference in Manila, Philippines.

The title of the conference alone - Bridging Culture and Commerce 2006: Strengthening the Crafts Enterprises of Indigenous Communities - made me eager to join. It is true that we are starting our indigenous handicrafts development for forest-based communities in Cambodia. We have found the conference useful for our crafts development initiatives for the indigenous communities who live in the forests.

Before coming to this conference, I realised that we just woke up in Cambodia, and now we have got up and been moving with a tough commitment towards crafts development in order to improve the livelihoods of the marginalised and disadvantaged communities, particularly indigenous people in Cambodia. We fortunately have learnt a lot from experiences and lessons of the NTFP-TF/EP and participants who attended the conference.

For instance, I appreciate that Salay Handmade Paper Industries has progressed from a 10-member handicrafts group in 19 years. Speakers made their excellent presentations in plenary sessions and group discussions in which we have learnt from experiences and consultations on production system, product development, marketing, entrepreneurial enterprise development, leading and management. We have not only learnt from successful stories and opportunities, but also tips for overcoming barriers and difficulties. More importantly Ms. Nola, Crafts Coordinator and Ms. Crissy, Deputy Director of NTFP-TF/EP friendly shared with us a lot of their experiences in indigenous crafts development, especially Customade and Modi, including community-based enterprise development, crafts production and development, and marketing. These are absolutely useful for indigenous handicrafts development in Cambodia.

We appreciate the excellent organization of this crafts conference. Not only the local participants who can benefit from it, but also participants from Cambodia and Malaysia can understand the process with friendly and good interpretation. This is really unforgettable. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank all NTFP-TF/EP for their collaborative and friendly communication in both personal and professional manner. Mr. Sammol and I felt like we had never left our country and was working with our own colleagues in Cambodia because of their goodness and friendliness. We returned home with inspiration and much knowledge and experiences regarding crafts development.

Attending the crafts conference, we have created more useful relations among participants including community leaders, speakers, crafts makers, cooperatives, peoples organisations, and NGOs. We do hope that this relation will bring us to work together for the benefits of communities in the future. And I expect that our indigenous crafts makers will have an opportunity to attend the 4th Crafts Conference next year.

What CAN-DO can do...

CAMBODIAN NTFP DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION (CAN-DO)
“Towards sustainable forest-based livelihoods in Cambodia”

We are pleased to introduce CAN-DO, a local Cambodian non-governmental, non-profit, non-political and non-religious organisation established in June 2006 by a group of Cambodian development workers. CAN-DO is committed to promote NTFP-based livelihoods development in Cambodia through sustainable integration between forest, particularly NTFP conservation and economic development. Marginalized and disadvantaged forest-based communities, particularly indigenous ones are our targeted beneficiaries.

Our Vision: Rural communities of Cambodia live in prosperous and dignified condition through sustainable forest resources management, community economic development and promotion of social well-being.

Our Mission

To contribute to strengthening the capacity of local communities for the sustainable forest resources management, in particular, NTFP management, and to socio-economic development.

To promote the rehabilitation of social culture, tradition and structure of Cambodia, particularly in local communities.

To increase local products of NTFPs using community-based NTFPs sustainably.

To promote appropriate market opportunities and strategies for the sustainable NTFP products.

Strategies

Empower local communities by strengthening their capacity to sustainably manage their forests, particularly NTFPs, through NTFP processing, production and marketing.

Promote community-based NTFPs by providing market access services.

Undertake community-based economic development means linking with forests conservation that are appropriate for the local communities in which self-help groups, local small NTFP-based enterprises are encouraged and promoted.

Link and network with local communities, NGOs, relevant government institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders in implementing the overall process to ensure that local social culture and structure are promoted, local communities have access to tenure rights, local forests and NTFPs are managed and used in a sustainable manner, and local products have market access.

Present activities: CAN-DO is currently focusing on bamboo, rattan, forest honey and malva nut development in order to improve forest-based livelihoods development. We are starting an indigenous handicrafts development aiming to promote the livelihood and preservation of cultures of local communities.

Partnership and cooperation: We are now working closely with NTFP-EP, Traidcraft and other local partners. In order to run our forest-based livelihoods development in sustainable manner, CAN-DO encourages and promotes the networking and cooperation with international, regional and local NGOs, funding agencies, experts, academic institutions, and private bodies to transform the local initiatives into the sustainable development.

© SARIM HEANG, CAN-DO, Cambodia
In almost all forested regions of the world, rich with various resources and inhabited by indigenous peoples, a class of middlemen has inevitably appeared. These middlemen have usually made a living by buying materials – animal skins and bones, spices, timber and other plant products – from the local people and selling them in other places. Nothing really wrong with buying and selling, at least in the initial stages: the local people receive money for things they have in abundance, and the middlemen make a profit by taking the goods where it is scarce.

The trouble, at least for the indigenous people, seems to start when the goods become scarce in places where they were once abundant. It is also trouble when a nexus of middlemen get together and control the prices that the local people get, or when the middlemen prevent local access to a truly open market. Wherever such circumstances have come to pass, there is the trend of the indigenous people moving out of the region – like the goods that were carted out before them – to eke out a livelihood. Unfortunately, this trend is quite common in many parts of the tropical world. But the loss of cultures and the magical landscapes they figured in go unnoticed in the all-pervading din over oil and the clamour for power.

Mahua and Mahua Banks

It is with the intention to reverse this trend that some indigenous people in Bastar, Chattisgarh, came together and decided to establish a Mahua Bank. To understand its significance, we need to learn what mahua is and what place it holds in indigenous society. Mahua is the name given to the tree *Madhuca longifolia* as well as to the flowers and the drink distilled from them. The mahua drink, which has been much abused, is traditionally used in all social and religious occasions throughout Bastar. It is consumed throughout the year in most indigenous homes; the flowers, which bloom between late February and early March, are dried and stored for sale as well as for later use. However, the lack of sufficient storage space and the need for money forces most people to sell a large part of what they seasonally gather, despite realising that within a few months they will need to go to the local middlemen, who usually double as moneylenders, to procure more mahua.

The mahua bank is a village affair. Men, women and children gather to get their mahua blossoms weighed and priced in Kakalura.
The first Mahua Bank was constructed in Kakalura, a Durva village in central Bastar. The Bank’s purpose is to buy the mahua within the village itself at the going market rate and store it through the crucial period when the people need money. This mahua was stored and sold back to the people at a marginally higher rate, the small profit considered as “storage fees.”

The two boys who managed the Bank were unused to handling large sums of money; in their first year they bought only about Rs 5000 of mahua from the village people. Despite its humble beginning, this first step demonstrated to the people what the advantages and potentials were of such a Bank within the village. They did not have to walk far with their loads in the sun, they were not cheated at the scales, payments were made immediately and, most importantly, they were treated with respect. In the three years since, the Mahua Bank at Kakalura has now graduated to buying another important NTFP of Bastar: tamarind. Over the last two years tamarind worth about Rs 1,00000 has been bought, shelled, de-seeded and packed within the village, generating some seasonal income and building confidence.

Similar Banks have been established in two other villages though their focus has not been the buying and selling of NTFPs. The Bank in Koleng has become the seed collection centre, while a group of women also deal with limited amounts of mahua. The seeds of various indigenous plant species of plants are grown in nurseries in Kakalura as well as in Kangoli. There is a Bank in Sang Karmari that buys and sells mahua alongside efforts to protect the village’s sacred grove, one of the few groves with a large diversity of species. In this manner, a small network of like-minded people has taken up NTFP-related work, through trade, regeneration and conservation of locally important spaces and species.

Though the Mahua Banks have, as yet, focused only on mahua and tamarind, the aim is to gradually increase the number of products. But before this ambition – to increase the range of available forest products for trade – is catered to, it is necessary to put some checks to control haphazard or unsustainable exploitation of resources. In the case of most indigenous communities who continue to live in deep forest areas, many of the traditional customs of forest use are adhered to. It is usually in the areas where the people have lost their forests, or where commercial forces have an overwhelming influence on community lifestyles, that the above mentioned checks are required. If this is not done, the Mahua Banks would be no different from any of the myriad enterprises whose sole aim is instant financial gain.

Obstacles

An early problem that surfaced soon after the first Bank was in operation was the middleman! A couple of them came to Kakalura and made threatening noises at a new buyer but, as they soon found out, the people of the village were undaunted. In fact, a few weeks after the middlemen’s visit the Bank in Koleng was opened. Another issue that periodically distracts the “bank managers” is the low level of profit, as much of it is diffused into the village itself through the various processing jobs. To counter this is not easy, especially when the youth concerned are also aspiring to be rich and are within easy reach of the lucrative NTFP trade!

There are no easy solutions. It is necessary to realise that Mahua Banks, though linked to the trade in NTFPs, are also much, much more. The Bank, despite its commercial front, links the many facets of NTFPs: forests and indigenous peoples, traditional management, sustainability, the dangers of over-exploitation, conservation and regeneration, income generation, local enterprise, etc. For those working in the Mahua Bank this broader scenario, that encompasses not just monetary gain but addresses the possibility of a meaningful future, needs to be gradually unveiled. Perhaps then it will be easier to discern the difference between the World Bank and the Mahua Bank!

Support for setting up the Mahua Bank in Kakalgar was provided by BothEnds, The Netherlands.

Madhu Ramnath, Legal and Environmental Action Forum (LeAF), Jagdalpur, Bastar District, Chattisgarh, India
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Virtual Academy: expertise that works for communities

By VINCE DOCTA, NTFP-EP

Since its inception, the NTFP Exchange Programme maintains informal contacts with scientists in relevant disciplines, not only in South and Southeast Asia but in the other parts of the globe. In recent years, the EP felt the need to intensify this collaboration through the establishment of a ‘Virtual Academy.’

The idea of a Virtual Academy or VA first sprang up at the end of 2003 during brainstorming sessions with NGOs and representatives from the academe in Indonesia and in the Philippines. In these sessions, it was agreed that the VA will be constituted of a group of eminent scholars and “practical academicians,” who are devoted to making their skills work for local initiatives directed at promoting community-based sustainable forest use and management.

It is aptly called “virtual” in the sense that it does not need to maintain offices, structures and the like. That its core members share common values – most important of which is truly wanting to help forest-based communities to build their capacities – is what binds this loose group of NTFP specialists.

Since the onset, the VA is envisioned to:
- maintain linkages with other scientists/institutes;
- assist in the writing of position papers on key issues;
- contribute to international conservation and development discourse;
- support the translation of grass root needs into concrete directions for future research agenda;
- facilitate individual members to act as resource persons for specific activities; and
- provide inputs to customized training programs for NGO field staff.

The VA fellows and NTFP-EP have thought of preparing training courses/modules for partners in the network with the objective of establishing a basic course for practitioners, field personnel working on NTFP management. This course would be supplemented with more specific topic-based courses. Considering the dearth of relevant, customized, community-centered training programs available, this idea seems timely and useful for local practitioners.

The year 2006 signaled the reinforcement and further strengthening of the Virtual Academy’s mandate and its aforementioned dream as the beautiful resort-type facilities of the Eugenio Lopez Center in Antipolo City, Philippines (a hillside town about an hour’s drive outside Manila) paid host to this year’s VA Meeting held on 5-6 June 2006.

The meeting was participated in by VA fellows: Dr. Mary Stockdale of the Canada-based NGO Land and People Information Sharing (LAPIS) and author of Steps to Sustaintable and Community-based NTFP Management: A manual written with special reference to South and Southeast Asia; Dr. Patricia Shanley, of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and People and Plants International (PPI); Mr. Ridzki Sigit of Telapak, Indonesia; Ms. Ma. Theresa Padilla-de Guia of AnthroWatch Philippines, and the NTFP-EP Secretariat, led by its Executive Director, Mr. Jenne de Beer.

The group revisited the concept of the VA. A review of the curriculum of academic institutions offering NTFP courses (Royal Roads University-Canada and the Indigenous Peoples College in Davao City, Philippines) was also undertaken to provide a broad perspective on what distinct features could be adopted by the VA in its own training courses.

Prior to the meeting, a questionnaire was formulated and sent out to EP partners to consolidate their training needs, and to serve as an integral input in the development of NTFP courses. Responses highlighted the glaring and immediate capacity building needs that are country specific; existing training providers identified for certain identified topics/themes which need attention; and proposed modules to be developed which have been grouped into nine training themes (below).

Training themes:
- NTFP certification
- Processing/post-harvest/product development
- Marketing/business management
- Resource Management
- Identification/prioritization of NTFPs for communities
- Cultural aspects/knowledge and traditional use of resources
- Capacity building/institutional management/organisational development
- Advocacy/negotiation/resource access
- Sustainable livelihood planning and management

While the VA fellows who were present at the meeting are considered to be experts in the areas of resource management, advocacy, certification, cultural aspects, the themes on business management, marketing, product development, and enterprise development emerged as the top priority among partners. In response to this, an enterprise development committee was formed comprising of NTFP-EP partners known to have inimitable familiarity on these topics.

Future plans carved out during the meeting included publications to be released, intended workshops/conferences to be attended to by the members and prioritization of capacity-building programs for EP partners. Preparatory activities are making headway for the ecological monitoring training for India partners in November as well as the upcoming plans to go to Mexico and Brazil for the workshops on sustainable management of NTFPs in Latin America.

For more information on the Virtual Academy, contact the NTFP-EP secretariat at info@ntfp.org.
Brad Pitt’s bed & Brazilian honey
ENTRY POINTS TO NTFP POLICY REFORM IN THE PHILIPPINES
By MARIA CRISTINA S. GUERRERO, NTFP-TF, The Philippines

Last 16 November, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) invited the NTFP Task Force to a meeting of the Technical Working group of the DENR and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) on the harmonization of the implementation of indigenous peoples’ rights and environmental policies. We were asked to present our draft policy proposal on the rules and regulations on the extraction and marketing of non-timber forest products within ancestral domains. It was a rare opportunity as the said proposal met much resistance from the Forest Management Bureau of DENR. This was our chance to get the policy discussion moving at higher level within these agencies!

To stress the urgency of reducing the bureaucracy of NTFP permitting procedures for indigenous communities, I presented the NTFP industry in the Philippines, with a global focus on forest honey and rattan products. I pointed out that the Philippines is currently a net importer of honey, and because of unsupportive policies, forest honeys of the Philippines could not be transported from the provinces and garner the higher prices that Brazilian and Zambian honeys fetch on the international market. I also spoke about the achievements of the Cebu furniture companies which contribute considerably to the US$300 million generated by the Philippine furniture industry; 30% of which is comprised of rattan materials. I highlighted the nouveau riche – movie actor Brad Pitt designed by internationally renowned and multi-awarded designer Kenneth Cobonpue, a native of Cebu City. That got the room stirring!

Finally, after getting the room excited about the industry prospects, I got down to the real issues and bottlenecks of Philippine policy on NTFPs which are hurdles to the development of NTFP industries. These include the lengthy permitting system, inappropriate monitoring systems for NTFP resources, high forest charges and the disconnect between policies of different government agencies (the reason why we made the draft policy to begin with), among other issues. I gave the recommendations of the NTFP Task Force on the harmonization of policies, the fast-tracking of NTFP permits, the streamlining of requirements, the reduction of forest taxes and the need to explore more cost-effective, participatory NTFP monitoring systems.

I ended with the salient features of the proposed policy on NTFP harvesting and marketing which would recognise community generated resource use plans as permits for NTFP harvesting and trade once duly validated by the DENR.

Executive Director of the NCIP, Ms. Rosalino Bistoyong was the first to support the NTFP Task Force’s call to form a policy working committee between the two agencies to come up with policy recommendations in support of NTFP harvesting and trade of indigenous people. Undersecretary Teresita Castillo swiftly formed a working group of members from both agencies and invited NTFP-TF to join in the policy discussions. She demanded that within 3 weeks, the said working committee should present their recommendations.

Let’s hope this responsive and progressive act by both agencies will finally lead to more community supportive resource use policies that would help generate greater incomes for indigenous forest-based peoples!

The author can be reached at crissyg33@yahoo.com

A dream come true: honey & bee museum in Ooty, India
By MATHEW JOHN, Keystone, India

It has been a long seven months since work on this got underway but the dream has been a few years old. One would always have expected that a shop in Ooty, the tourist hub of this district would have seen us setting up something there first, but it has been a reverse process – Kotagiri (1999), Coonoor (2001) and now Ooty (2006). However, this is different and cool! We have a Hopey & Bee Museum, a first of its kind, definitely in this part of the world. It has sections on Bee Biology, Honey Hunting, Bees of India, Beekeeping, etc. – right now, it is essentially, pictorial. We hope to add more material slowly building a database of information, so that interested folks can grasp issues in depth. The Museum section is supplemented by a children’s playroom where they can have a great time messing around with wax. Another room hopes to multi-task as a library, audiovisual and meeting room. Still a long way to go...

The inauguration was a great affair with so much support from the public and the civil administration.

Mrs. Meena Gupta, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs was there to open the Museum and took extremely keen interest in all the information displayed. This was later followed in the evening, by a brainstorm on a ‘National Tribal Honey Network’ – most of the honey produced in our country is collection from the wild but none of it is ever acknowledged nor is the skillful activity given due recognition. Hopefully, this effort will go some way in trying to address the myriad of issues that face the adivasis.

The support from the bees is something that should not be forgotten! Yes, you read it right – five days before the inauguration, a swarm of the Giant Rock Bees Apis dorsata decided to make the verandah of the museum, their home. The excitement and thrill that ran through everybody was fantastic. Their presence had to force us to change the entrance to the museum but I guess nobody bothered.

The Green Shop was inaugurated by Mr. Santosh Misra, Collector of the Nilgiris. This section will stock goods for sale not only from the projects of Keystone but from various parts of the country. However, each of the products, organisations have been selected with care. They should uphold certain ideals which have been put up as a charter in the shop – organic, fair trade, small producers, indigenous crafts – lofty ideals, maybe, but something to hold on to.

Initial support for the project has come from the Green Hotel in Mysore (through the Tzidakah Trust) and the Darwin Initiative, UK.

Email: kf@keystone-foundation.org
URL: www.keystone-foundation.org

FROM TOP-BOTTOM: Opening ceremonies, guests looking at products in the Green Shop, a view of the new honey and bee museum building.
Strengthening forest-based livelihood in the new governance system: An example from Orissa, India

By NABAGHAN OJHA
RCDC Centre for Forestry and Governance, India

The forest sector in Orissa plays an important role in the economy, culture and livelihood of a large number of forest-dependent poor and it represents a huge economic resource for the State. It has a rich potential of various NTFPs, which are important sources of livelihood for the forest-dependent population.

Unfortunately for quite sometime, the trade of NTFPs was monopolised mostly by private business houses who were granted leases on a long-term basis to procure certain forest produce from specific forest divisions. Such monopoly trade arrangement created problems of low payment to tribals, erratic and arbitrary procurement, and revenue loss to the state.

In order to streamline the system of collection and disposal of NTFPs, and to follow the mandate of the Provisions of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 2006 (PESA), the State Government came out with a new policy guideline on 31.03.2000. The policy gave ownership rights over Minor Forest Produce (MFP) to the Gram Panchayat not only in scheduled areas but also in the entire State. Provisions under the new NTFP Policy/regulations exclude high-value NTFPs like Kendu leaf (Diospyros melanoxylon), Sal seed (Shorea robusta) and bamboo (Bambusa vulgaris) from the list of deregulated items. The State continued to manage these items, as these are the nationalised NTFP. In March 2006 Sal seed was deregulated and brought under the purview of GP. By now the total items of MFP devolved to GP are 69.

More than six years have passed since the new governance system in the State has been operational. These new systems are hardly working in tribal dominated areas due to lack of capacities at the level of Panchayat functionaries to decide the price structure and handle necessary market linkages for fair trading of NTFPs. On the other hand, the primary gatherers – being little aware of the price system due to inadequate communication on price fixation – continue to be exploited in the hands of petty traders, who often pay a token advance to the tribals for procuring NTFPs at a cheaper price during production seasons, and also insist on barter systems for a good gain. Although the poor forest dwellers including the tribal depend heavily on the NTFP for their livelihood they are in no way influence either the policies or the trade environment. The ultimate result is although they work hard to collect and process the NTFP they are being paid miserably low as compensation. Moreover the polices and rules concerning NTFP management, which is identified as the main source of income and as safety net for poor by a number of researches, have not been able to bring any significant change in the livelihood system of the forest-dependent poor.

Possible options for strengthening forest-based livelihood

There is a need for collective intervention by the civil society organisations, business houses, financial institutions and the government to address various issues in NTFP management and trade. The most important intervention should be to build up the capacity and information base of the primary collectors and the Gram Panchayats on management and trade of NTFP. At the same time priority of intervention has to be given to forest protection, quality production of NTFP, value-added products instead of raw NTFPs, market promotion and market development, etc.

RCDC with its decade of experience in the forest sector has been able to come out with some possible options, which could be experimented in other parts of the country.

Some facts & figures
- Orissa accounts for 7.38% of the total forest cover in India
- 22% of its population belong to scheduled tribes
- 40% area of the state comes under Scheduled V
- For the poor, up to 50% of annual income comes from forest
- The total annual volume of NTFP trade was estimated at about Rs. 1,000 crore in the State
- The total women labour engaged in the collection of forest produce in Orissa is as high as 300 million woman days.

CENTER, this page: A self-help group involved in making a tonic of Madhuca indica.
All photos for this article by the author.
Gram Panchayat

After 2000, Gram Panchayat has emerged as the most vibrant institution to own, control and manage a majority of NTFPs (69 items). Although GPs are not supposed to undertake the trade they would control the entire trade in their area. They would work towards establishing community-based management of NTFP. If the GPs are interested they can also directly get involved in the trade through collaboration with different marketing institutions in the State.

The role of GP in effective management and trade of NTFP should be as follows:

- Power to make rules and regulations for control and management of NTFP and also to impose tax/levy/cess on different NTFP
- Power to decide which NTFP to be harvested and not to be harvested
- Power to decide who would be given right to harvest the produce
- Regulate the implementation of rules and take appropriate measures for changes in these rules and regulation
- Cancellation of licenses of different traders or agencies involved in procurement and trade of NTFP or restrict any trader from procurement of NTFP from the area because of violation of rules/norms
- Create awareness among the members of Gram Sabha on rules and regulations for management of NTFPs
- Implement these rules and regulations
- Collection of taxes for traders/enterprises
- Maintain proper accounting and book keeping system and develop human resource capacity of the Gram Panchayats/Gram Sabhas to manage NTFPs properly

Market Promotion Board

RCDC is floating the concept of a market promotion board at the district level. It is a unique attempt, which emerged during discussions at various fora during RCDC's interventions. The concept is being shared with different stakeholders in the areas. Efforts have been made to present a probable structure and function of a district level organisation to deal with NTFPs, which would form the basis for debate among various stakeholders. It has been successfully constituted in some districts and smoothly functioning. The board has been able to organise traders meet in their areas to sell the NTFPs collected by primary collectors.

Goals of market promotion initiatives at the district level:

- To support NTFP gatherers/primary collectors and their organisations to overcome constraints both within business and wider trade environment
- To create conducive environment for the primary collectors and their organisations for sustainable management of NTFPs and participate in socially responsible trading
- To provide innovative, need based market solutions to primary NTFP gatherers

Structure

Market promotion board or committee may be constituted with the representations of government officials such as District Collector, Divisional Forest Officer, etc., financial institutions, Panchayat Raj Institutions, civil society organisations, market promotion agencies, traders, associations, representatives of processing industries, etc.

Function

- To frame guidelines for sustainable management of NTFP and also develop quality control mechanism
- To develop price fixation guideline in order to help Panchayat Samities to fix the prices of MFP and should also monitor and regulate the prices offered by the traders to the primary collectors
- To help GPs to regulate the operation of traders in their area
- Develop a plan of action for conservation, management and trade of NTFP
- Suggest necessary changes policies, programmes and practices for conservation of the resource and better returns to the primary collectors and producers
- Negotiate with traders/buyers/industries, etc. for marketing of NTFPs and establish linkages between the primary collectors' organisations and traders/industries. If need be, necessary steps may be taken for buy back arrangements
- Develop a guideline for sustainable harvesting and regeneration of species
- Undertake or facilitate research and development for conservation of species, value addition and product development
- Procurement, processing and storage of different forest and agricultural produces
- Educating the primary collectors on good harvesting practices and conservation issues
- Monitoring the harvesting and conservation protocols
- Managing the enterprises on forest and agricultural produces
- Running the fair prices shops
- Working closely with respective gram panchayats for management and trade of NTFPs

Cooperative Approach

Cooperatives have been identified as the best possible option for NTFP enterprises and trade. Cooperatives are the federated bodies of the village-level institutions like Self Help Groups (SHGs), Forest Protection Committees (FPCs), etc. These institutions have been sensitized on issues in NTFP management and trade and have been exposed to different options for collective procurement and trade to eliminate the exploitative practices followed by the local traders. Around 20 institutions have been targeted while forming the cooperatives. Once the cooperatives are formed, members oriented and they have gotten themselves engaged in collective procurement and trade, the process of formation of apex cooperatives are initiated which could monitor the exploitation of resources and conservation protocols, develop a business plan for NTFP procurement and trade, etc.

Meeting of a cooperative organised by RCDC

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Meeting of a market promotion board which was organised by RCDC
A few years back, I had the opportunity to accompany some Fair Trade partner buyers and representatives from the US, UK and other European countries (1) to visit rural crafts communities in remote areas in Pangasinan, Abra, Bicol and Leyte. The occasion fostered a deeper trading relationship among partners. The most interesting part was listening to the moving accounts of craft stories shared by the visiting partners, expressing a plight akin to the conditions of the crafts communities in the Philippines.

It is encouraging to see how the lives of many women and men producers from third world communities have improved by engaging in crafts production as their major trade and livelihood. They have not only achieved better financial stability for their families and communities but also other seemingly insignificant non-monetary gains or what Anita L. Roddick calls as those “beyond the bounce of economic performance” (2). Indeed, a barometer in measuring the line of business ethics is not forgetting the Human Element in trading.

A cultural (ad)vantage point

In Mindoro, the crafts story has a different cultural perspective. To understand indigenous crafts, one has to have an open, patient and challenging mind and above all, a warm listening heart to fully appreciate if not to embrace and identify with the culturally-based production and trading context. Mindoro and several outlying islands constitute the provinces of Mindoro Oriental. The chief town of the island is Calapan City (total area: 10,075 sq km; population: 282,593). Mindoro is the seventh biggest island in the Philippines with over 1 million inhabitants with close to 10% belonging to the indigenous peoples called Mangyan.

Mangyan is the generic name for the seven indigenous tribes namely; Hanunuo, Alangan, Tadyawan, Buhid, Iraya, Bangon and Tau-Buhid, each with own culture, language and customs.

For the Mangyan, crafts had always been a product of their way of life and an extension of their customs and traditions. Tabud (baskets), ramit cloth, embroidery, and beaded products, to mention few, have always been produced using materials indigenous to their areas.

Nowadays, it is rare to see the younger generation of Mangyan in these attire, except perhaps when they are in their communities and during tribal feasts.

On the other hand, these products continue to be in vogue perhaps as a subdued expression of oneness with nature, if not a boredom with commercialised products. Indigenous crafts are slowly but continuously gaining recognition as a growing source of income for the Mangyans. These products will not likely fade in popularity despite attempts of preserving their unique culturally-based character and heritage.

It is a sad and myopic view to preserve a rich culture and tradition merely because it allows indigenous products a chance to survive. One way out for these culturally-based products that embodies as well the culture, tradition and aspirations of the indigenous craft folks to survive is through a “distant light in the market.” Lest invasion by other products produced under unfair labor practices, products that demean industrial peace and development both for human and environment, becomes the order of the day. Then it’s naturally treading a thin line toward a sure and gradual unnatural death for all of us and for the limited God-given resources.

The dramatic transition towards the emergence of “green and ethical products” as compared to “sympathy (with non-quality) products” is a Sign of Hope. With a more positive outlook, this development will precipitate a better chance for indigenous products as long as products are priced fairly among end market consumers, fair traders and producers.

The approach: a hard gradual change toward a distant light

The Produktong Likhagang Kamay Crafts Program is espoused by the the NTFP-Task Force/CustomeMade Crafts Center, the Mangyan Mission, Kapulungan ngmga Mangyan para sa Lupaing Ninuno (KPLN), and Mangyan Partner Producer Groups (MPPGs). The MPPGs are crafts producing communities assisted...
under the said project. Majority of members are women. During the PLK project orientation, plans at various levels were formulated and validated at the community level, in order to map out the timeline of activities for the first year of the project {see box at right}. Understanding the context of Ancestral Domains confronting Mangyans (Section 2b of IPRA, 1997) is an issue that I have slowly recognised as an essential element in Community Enterprise Building amongst Mangyan communities alongside Fair Trading. 

Never a long trek

There are no great expectations nor killer assumptions given the context and culture – only perseverance and constant journeying – that self-reliance, which was long-awaited, may come to fruition. The NTFP Task Force/CustomMade Crafts Center remains committed to the advancement and promotion of indigenous development. That the trading relationship we are fostering with MPPGs fulfills our raison d’etre of positive social and environmental change where it is most needed.

Despite the difficulty of attempting to walk together in a long dusty if not muddy crossroads and pathways, the benefits of the “trading partnership” is hard to measure. These relations transpire beyond trading, since trading is only a way, an entry point if not a vehicle towards integral development for all of us committed to crafts development. It is also in a way a constant re-examining of our stance though in a simple but meaningful way. Only those who have given precious time despite the need for personal, social and family bonding and necessary ties will ever internalize affectively the depth and meaning of the journey that is trading crafts. The reality check is in measuring the success of these partnerships – in how livelihoods of many people with faces and warm bodies were sustained – while helping us in the process to retain our humanness in our trading with others.

Let me show you a glimpse of a distant light. A few MPPG members are now taking more initiative to strengthen their women’s organisation. They are now benefitting from the supplementary income and have gained additional leverage for decision making. This has translated into a better opportunity to express their opinions and in confidently participating more and more in community activities that will facilitate another ripple effect.

Indeed a slow trek toward a distant light in the market, is never a long trek after all.

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### Endnotes:

1. From Ten Thousand Villages USA-Canada, Mennonites, Eine Welt Handel, CTM, SISAM, Oxfam GB-FT and the Bodyshop among others
2. The Bodyshop Values Report, 1996-97, p. 3, Anita L. Roddick Obe (Chief Executive)
3. The Hanunuo Mangyan script have been declared as National Cultural Treasures in 1997 and was inscribed in the Memory of the World registers of UNESCO in 1999

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Old Male Shooting: Because of the over-abundance of wild boar in Pune district, Maharashtra, India, the local government recently announced that it is allowed again to hunt the thriving animals. That is, OLD MALES ONLY! A sensible stipulation, though the hunters in the district must be all fast decision makers then ...

Promised Land: Palm Oil and Land Acquisition in Indonesia – Implications for Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples. This report exposes the serious injustices caused to indigenous peoples, local communities and smallholders – their lands, forests, livelihoods and cultures – as palm oil plantations are expanding in Indonesia, driven on by the global demand for palm oil as biodiesel.

Informed by field studies of six palm oil estates in three provinces, the report shows how laws, policies and practices are systematically prioritising the interests of estate companies, and are often backed by foreign investors.

By Marcus Colchester et al.
Published by Sawit Watch, Forest Peoples Programme, HuMA and World Agroforestry Centre, 2006. 197 pp. Also available in Bahasa Indonesia.

The Keystone Hand Book on Honey Hunting. The book endeavours to bring forth nuances of honey hunting unknown to outsiders, besides serving as a guide for correct and easy-to-use directions on management of honey.

The target audience includes honey hunters, forest department personnel, as well as NGO workers and trainers.

A limited number of copies is available free of charge for EP partners. Published by the Keystone Foundation, Kotagiri, 2006. Dedicated to the honey hunters of the Blue Mountains. 55 pp. Bi-lingual: English/Malayalam. With great illustrations/drawings by a group of tribal artist from the Nilgiris. Some drawings were inspired by Riak Bumi/JMHI’s Manual Madu [see above].

To request hard copies, please email Keystone at kf@keystone-foundation.org

Manual Madu. Published for members of the Jaringan Madu Hutan Indonesia or Forest Honey Network Indonesia, this handy and full-color comics-style manual is a guide for the proper management of wild honey, on the basis of the tikung (rafter) method which is commonly used in Danau Sentarum. It also stresses proper post-harvest and handling, and testing methods to ensure quality.

Published by Riak Bumi and JMHI. 2006. 12 pp. In Bahasa Indonesia, there are also plans for an English translation.

Available as PDF at www.ntfp.org. For hard copies, please contact Riak Bumi at riakbumi@pontianak.wasantara.net.id, tel: +62.561.737132

Manual Madu.

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The NTFP-EP is a collaborative network of about 40 non-govern mental organisations and community-based organisations in South and Southeast Asia. We work with forest-based communities to strengthen their capacity in sustainable management of natural resources.

Support for the publication of Voices: MISEREOR and HIVOS

Ooops! Last issue’s “My goodness!” – Honey that isn’t – was mistakenly credited to the wrong source. We acknowledge the source, Bee for Development. Our sincere apologies!