

Voices from the Forest

Issue No. 36 February 2020

NTFP-EP

non-timber
forest products -
exchange programme

Breathing life
into community
enterprises

AN INSIDER LOOK AT GREEN INTERMEDIARIES

Voices from the Forest

Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP) is a collaborative network of over 100 civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) whose mission is to catalyze the empowerment of forest-dependent communities in Asia towards the sustainable management of forested landscapes & ecosystems.

Voices from the Forest is the official newsletter of NTFP-EP. It is released bi-annually and contains regional and country forests and peoples updates from the NTFP-EP network.

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Cover photo by
Anna Nilson, Last Forest Enterprise
*For more than a decade, Sumitra has been
an inspiration and guiding light for many at
the Pudukkad production center in India.*

EDITOR'S NOTES

The NTFP Network believes that an effective way to protect and expand the forests of earth, and simultaneously fight poverty, is by helping forest dwellers make a good living from the forest itself by increasing the value of the various non-timber forest products. That may not be the only way but certainly, a good place to start.

- Pastor Delbert Rice, NTFP-EP Credo

The 36th issue of Voices from the Forest highlights the network's core work—livelihoods. NTFP-EP believes that to ensure the sustainability of managing forests, it is crucial for communities to maintain or improve their livelihoods. One of NTFP-EP's determined entry points to forging good relations with communities is the creation of opportunities that help sustain a stable community economy through forests.

Over the years, a number of green local, national, and regional intermediaries have been established that helped pave the way in marketing and promoting the sustainable use of forest resources other than timber (page 3).

Strategic support given to women's organizations in Indonesia have resulted to tremendous success not only in terms of economic gains but also in forest conservation (pages 10 and 12).

The success of network is living proof that the use of NTFPs serve not just cultural and ecological use but also (and perhaps most importantly) economic ones. It was through its work on the identification, development, utilization, management, and promotion of the use of NTFPs that the network has come to be known to what it is today.

Experience shared from the ground gave new regional perspectives when NTFP-EP created an open space for civil society organizations and forest producers in the Asia-Pacific Forestry Week 2019 in Incheon, Republic of South Korea (pages 18 and 21).

However, it is important to note that this success was not only through the strategic interventions and technical assistance provided by the NTFP-EP network to its partner communities. For example, 'going to school' takes a completely new meaning as NTFP-EP Philippines shared their experience in innovating ways to enhance knowledge transfer among indigenous communities (page 16).

At its core is the communities' belief that NTFPs are worth investing in and how this translates to success is exactly what this issue of Voices from the Forest highlights.



Breathing life into community enterprises

AN INSIDER LOOK AT GREEN INTERMEDIARIES

Article by Nandan, Joy Ann Chua,
Mila Nasianna, Pich Kimhean,
Maria Filomena Astiti and Earl Diaz

It's surprising how forest-based communities, despite their connection with their environment and the abundant resources in it, are usually the most impoverished. The lack of access to basic needs, insecurity of tenure, conflict issues, and forced inclusion in the market economy consigns unjust pressure on forest-based communities. Such complexities narrow their choices and reduce their chances to cope with the fast-changing times. All these coerce them to resort to unsustainable use of resources to meet both their subsistence and daily economic needs. With limited access to profitable market channels and financial support, aspiring forest enterprises, most often than not, end in failure.

While there is little evidence that large-scale timber production plays a substantial role in reducing poverty, community-based forest enterprises (CBFE) offer better possibilities most especially when it operates on values of collective ownership and equitable profit-sharing. While their success relies heavily on strong leadership, openness to change, a lot of it is also responding to holistic business incubation support and networking.

Over the years, NTFP-EP has been boosting traditional products for their cultural and 'green' values

by establishing green intermediaries. These marketing entities are spin-off enterprises that help market products of established CBFEs. Green intermediaries partner with communities which are willing to expand the markets for products in a socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable way. NTFP-EP's network of green intermediaries has become instrumental not only in developing new products but also in breathing life into aspiring communities.

Today, green intermediaries within NTFP-EP's network come in many shapes and sizes. These entities have created platforms that revitalize traditional crafts for creating a local sustainable market. From assisting communities in developing products and community ecotourism sites in Cambodia; to supporting one of the largest forest producer group in India; to fostering partnerships with government and corporate institutions in the Philippines; up to upscaling traditional crafts and products in Indonesia, NTFP-EP's green intermediaries have helped changed not only the communities they work with but also the people who run these intermediaries. Here's a rundown of some of the green intermediaries within the NTFP-EP network and the hardworking people behind them.

LAST FOREST ENTERPRISE, INDIA



NANDAN
Senior Manager for
Sales, Marketing, and
Business Development

I joined Last Forest because of the mission it has, the impact it makes to marginalised communities, and the specialty of working in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve.



Last Forest was established in 2010 to market the natural forest and agricultural produce by indigenous communities. It started as a project called Organic Market Development (OMD) within the NGO Keystone Foundation. Over the years, the project grew in size and volume. In 2010, it was necessary to be separated from the NGO register as a profit-hybrid institution in the form of a private limited company incubated by the Keystone Foundation. Last Forest provides marketing solutions to primary producer groups and communities that are working on forest and agriculture products, which are natural, wild, and local. It pioneers in providing sustainable living choices by differently connecting communities and the markets. Today, Last Forest has three retail shops in Kotagiri, Conoor, and Ooty. Its work with more than 45 groups across the country from 150 villages has created an impact for thousands of people in the country.

With adequate information from market research, Last Forest was able to connect the communities to the mainstream markets. This appropriation and mapping of resources to market demands and innovating based on that connection have been the key to its success.



FOR THE NEXT YEARS...

Last Forest would like to focus on

- Developing more products on personal care
- Enhancing its e-commerce platform to cater work on selling abroad through its exports
- Marketing its products to other regions beyond Europe

CUSTOMMADE CRAFTS CENTER, PHILIPPINES



JOY CHUA
Sales and
Marketing
Officer

I enjoy the intersection of crafts, advocacy and enterprise offered by CMCC. I love that I'm not just selling products, but also ones where people can appreciate the craftsmanship and support behind every weave or harvest.



CustomMade Crafts Center (CMCC) started as a project of NTFP-EP Philippines in 2003. It was officially registered in 2008 and marketed Philippine products in Metro Manila and around the world. In its effort to conserve forests, the organization works to improve the livelihoods of forest and upland dwellers through the promotion of non-timber forest products in the Philippines as a source of income. CMCC seeks to expand the market for fairly-traded products in the Philippines and beyond.

Marketing NTFPs is a challenge in terms of reconciling the urbanite to his or her cultural and environmental roots. CMCC ensures the attribution of the products they sell to the origin of indigenous crafts and its story. Such strategy establishes the narrative of the relationship between CMCC and our partner communities.

Authenticity and dedication to fair trade and high quality is what sets us apart from our competitors. With the wide range of players in the green market today, CMCC affirms to both its partner communities and clients that its advocacy is always to empower forest communities. At its core, CMCC highlights the communities and the forests they live in and not just for the promotion of one culture or enterprise.



FOR THE NEXT YEARS...

CMCC would like to focus on

- **Working with communities in innovating products that are functional and culturally timeless**
- **Partnering with government institutions on value addition for community products**

NATUREWILD CO. LTD., CAMBODIA



PICH KIMHEAN
Operations Manager

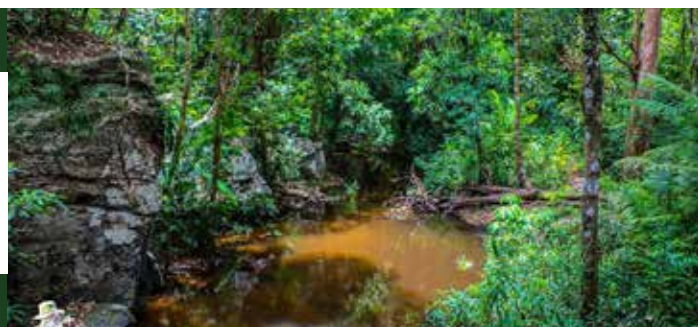
I wanted to share my knowledge in business development to the communities NatureWild is collaborating with. Together, I'd like us to develop new solutions to challenges in developing products and promoting the tourism industry in Cambodia.



NatureWild is an enterprise and marketing support service provider initiated by the Cambodia programme of NTFP-EP in late 2008. NatureWild directly assists its local network partners particularly community-based NTFP enterprises and NGO/social enterprise initiatives. It has since been moving towards more specialized and focused support services for communities who are engaged in NTFP development and community-based ecotourism. NatureWild envisions forest and natural resources being conserved and livelihood being sustainably improved in Cambodia through social enterprise development, sustainable production, and eco-friendly and fair marketing.

At Naturewild, we aim to change that perception and show them that forest products have value not just for consumers but, more importantly for forest-based producers.

There is a growing awareness of the benefits of engaging the green market both for consumers and producers. However, the challenge of pricing our products competitively still remains given the costs of high-quality community products.



FOR THE NEXT YEARS...

NatureWild would like to focus on

- Looking for prospective markets to explore
- Engaging more communities
- Increasing the volume of sales and revenue

BORNEO CHIC, INDONESIA



**MILA
HASIANNA**
Business Manager

I joined Borneo Chic because of its vision. I've always wanted to work with an organization built by and for the community. I am very interested in social entrepreneurship.



Borneo Chic started as an initiative of 5 Indonesian non-government organizations (NGOs) that joined together to form Crafts Kalimantan in 2008. Crafts Kalimantan is a network of indigenous artisans of Kalimantan and their NGO support groups. Seeing the potential of organized, expanded work at the ground level, it came together to conduct training activities with Dayak artisans in the effort to build a sustained movement to promote authentic indigenous crafts and sustainable livelihoods in Kalimantan. At that time, interest in certain Dayak crafts was dwindling, and other professions were drawing artisans away from their home and their traditions.

Borneo Chic was then established as the marketing arm of Crafts Kalimantan in the belief that continued and increased sales of traditional craft would revive the Dayak weaving traditions across the island. Borneo Chic sought to elevate traditional craft from Borneo, presenting important aspects of Indonesian heritage and nature to the urban sector. Thus Borneo Chic emerged as a collection of modern handbags merging elements of indigenous weaving traditions with contemporary designs. Borneo Chic launched its shop in Kemang in 2011 and since then carries products in 6 stores around the country.



FOR THE NEXT YEARS...

Borneo Chic would like to focus on

- **Expanding artisans network in Kalimantan**
- **Doing more collaboration with fashion accessories designers**
- **Increasing retailer network in Indonesia**

PARARA INDONESIAN ETHICAL STORE, INDONESIA



**MARIA
FILOMENA
ASTITI**
Duty Manager

I am interested in culinary arts and traditional food. In my past work I had been very much involved with the organic community as well and I believe in the importance of healthy food. Joining PARARA allows me to broaden my skills and explore more local food and local ingredients.



PARARA, short for panen raya nusantara or “the great harvest of the archipelago” is a civil society movement that started with a biennial festival promoting local products and local community enterprises based on sustainable and fair principles. Over 100 community enterprises have been supported with the efforts of close to 30 civil society organizations through interactive festivals held in the City of Jakarta (2015, 2017, 2019). The initiative has now evolved into a business, in addition to a festival, and launched a restaurant and store featuring healthy, sustainable food offerings from local communities in Indonesia, featuring attractive modern and traditional menus. The business is called the PARARA Indonesian Ethical Store and is also a marketing platform for local craft and art.

The PARARA business differentiates itself from others as its owners are from civil society organizations, individual activists as well as farmers, fishers, and producer organizations. Though we see this as a grassroots movement, we do want to engage with the public and urban level consumers seeking healthy but possibly innovative meals, and those that are not harmful to the environment and minimize carbon footprint.



FOR THE NEXT YEARS...

PARARA would like to focus on

- Stabilizing the operations and revenue
- Developing a good marketing strategy and build strong B to B partnerships
- Ensuring the sustainability of products
- Increasing the number and quality of products in the store

Indigo takes center stage this 2020



CLASSIC BLUE IS COLOR OF THE YEAR

Article and photos by Joy Ann Chua

Indigo is the most disputed color in the rainbow. Is it light blue? Is that another name for purple? For natural dyers, we pluck the indigo from the sky and color our fabrics from the light blue of the morning to the deep shades of midnight.

Indigo comes from a plant grown and processed by many Philippine indigenous communities such as the Mangyans in Mindoro, the Tingguians of Abra, the Higaonons of Bukidnon since the pre-Hispanic era. The plant is called Tagum/Tayum, but it looks like a malunggay (moringa) shrub that bears pink flowers.

Unlike other natural dyes that require fresh materials for the dye to be extracted, indigo can be made into a powder. The powder form can be easily transported to communities with no access to the natural dye and stored for later use.

The process is repetitive to the point of meditative. The newly-made indigo vat rests for a night, and I wake it in the morning with gentle stirrings, heat, and the application of its reducing chemical, sodium hydrosulfite. Sodium hydrosulfite removes the oxygen from the alkaline vat so that when the fabric is lifted, it turns from yellow to blue as oxygen fills its fibers.

Soaking the fabric in the indigo again makes it bluer. And as I soak and lift, soak and lift, the color turns from sky blue, royal blue, navy blue to

the deep blues we see in the dark, midnight sky. It does not stop there; as the fabric dries, the dark blue shades of midnight lighten into the placid blue of the sea.

Though unlike the tempestuous sea, the indigo dye is empathic and sensitive. It dyes marvelously well when I'm relaxed, but it refuses to dye when I'm impatient or irritated. Some cultures also observed this phenomenon of the "sulky vat". According to Victoria Finlay's book, "Color", the dye gets 'depressed' when husbands and wives fight in Java.

The Pantone Color Institute chose 19-4052 Classic Blue as the 2020 Color of the Year. As quoted by their Vice President Laurie Pressman, "The sky at dusk – it's not a midnight blue, it's thoughtful, but it's not so deep and mysterious," she said. "It speaks to our feelings of anticipation, when you think about the sky at dusk, the day isn't over." It holds true for indigo dyers. We dye with good thoughts and intentions, and get excited for the patterns the indigo would reveal. But until it dries, it isn't over. The work goes on with full hopes; it will turn out well. And it always does.

Indigo powder is available for sale at CustomMade Crafts Center Inc. at 61 Masikap Extension, Diliman, Quezon City. You can call 8929-3665 or email info@cmcrafts.org to buy the powder, a kit, or ask for a dyeing service for your old clothes.

Improving women's cash flow through cashew

STRENGTHENING OF THE CASHEW FARMER WOMEN'S GROUP IN THE HKM SAMBELIA

Article and photos by
the Social Forestry System
(KpSHK), Indonesia

Women's Farmers Group in Sugian and Dara Kunci Village, Sambelia District, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, participate in improving economic independence and better forest management and sustainable in Community Forest (HKm) Sambelia.

HKm Sambelia with an area of 420 hectares, is located in a production forest area. One of the biggest potential non-timber forest products is Cashew Bean. There are currently around 9,240 cashew trees that are productive, but the community is not maximized in processing cashew products.

Cashew harvest in Dara Kunci Village and Sugian Village starts from June to November each year. (Bayu KpSHK photo, Feb. 28, 2019)

So the increase in economic value generated from Cashew Bean will make this group of female farm-



The FGD identifies diversified processing of cashew (Bayu KpSHK photo, Feb. 26, 2019)



Bq. Rohani Chairperson of Women's Farmers Group in Dara Kunci Village, (Bayu KpSHK photo, Feb. 26, 2019)

ers actively take care of and preserve the forest. The cashew tree is known to function as a water catchment and becomes a buffer zone between settlements and forest areas.

Currently, with the support of the NTFP-EP GAGGA grants programme, groups of women farmers in Sugian and Dara Kunci villages are now able to process superior commodities in their village is Mete.

This group of women farmers accompanied by KpSHK has identified diversification of cashew processing according to local market interest. KpSHK has also increased the ability of groups of women farmers through training in processing cashew products, providing routine assistance, and helping with simple equipment for processing cashew products.

"I represent the Wana Lestari Women's Farmers Group, Dara Kunci Village, and I thank KPSHK and GAGGA. Hopefully, with this programme we will become independent and become career women," said Bq. Rohani, Chair of the Wana Lestari Women's Farmers Group in Dara Kunci Village. Hadiatun Chairperson of the Group of Women Farmers Bangkit Bersama in Sugian Village (Bayu KpSHK photo. Feb. 26, 2019)

"Please keep on accompanying us in managing the village's potential," said Hadiatun, Chair of the Group of Women Farmers Bangkit Bersama in Sugian Village to KpSHK.

As a result, this group of women has begun trying to peel cashew seeds using the Cashew nut breaker since the beginning of March 2019. By April 2019, the women farmers were accompanied by experienced practitioners from the University of Mataram in processing cashew products, including cashew oven, crisp, and snack bars.

Even this group of women farmers now understand several stages of the process of managing cashew products—starting from tapping, processing, packaging, and distributing their own cashew products.

We all hope that the strengthening of the Women's Farmers Group can be realized through the support of NTFP-EP and GAGGA. This could help increase the farmers' income and the role of women in conserving forests.

Photo: View of Malasari Village in TNGHS Area (Ari-KpSHK, 2019).



Mapping Malasari

WOMEN'S FARMERS IN HALIMUN SALAK, IMPROVING ECONOMY AND FOREST CONSERVATION

Article and photos by the
Social Forestry System
(KpSHK), Indonesia

Women's Farmers in Malasari Village are part of the family backbone of sustainable forest management through the Conservation Partnership program to improve the economy of the community as the main actors, especially female farmers.

Malasari Village is in Nanggung Subdistrict, Bogor Regency, West Java Province, where 78% of its area is within the Halimun Salak Mountain National Park. It is a tourist village of tropical forests with the charm of natural landscapes, and using local wisdom, is able to maintain water catchments and biodiversity.

The consortium supporting the Social Forestry System (KpSHK) with the support of the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) and the Non-Timber Forest Products-Exchange Program (NTFP-EP), and the village government has encouraged the role of women farmers to manage sustainable forests.

The Malasari Village community has carried out a series of activities that discussed the proposed

Conservation Partnership program involving female farmers. Participatory mapping of community-managed land identification and joint consolidation of documents for Conservation Partnership programs also occurred for the compilation of management plan documents.

Women farmers have begun to identify potential forest resources including local food potential, as well as the potential for NTFPs. They will develop the potential of the community commodity business.



Women's farmers' discussions on identifying potential commodities.

Malasari Village Secretary Mrs. Lela Isroria, SE., stated that the activity of identifying commodity potential helped the village program a lot in socio-economic mapping.

Mrs. Lela said, “This will be an input and reference for the village program. The village government will also monitor each hamlet directly”.

Mrs. Lela explained that Malasari Village is extensive, consisting of 4 hamlets, 12 Rukun Warga (division of regions in Indonesia), and 49 Rukun Tetangga (subdivisions), with a variety of potentials, both NTFP potential and environmental services.

Palm sugar and ginger are two of the potential commodities in Nyuncung Hamlet. Mrs. Eliya said, “Malasari was previously famous for Ginger Tea.”

Identifying potential NTFPs and the potential for business development of commodities are the initial information for the joint preparation of the cooperation agreement document and the management plan for the Conservation Partnership scheme.

Ms. Mynabel T. Pomarin, Programme Officer of the Pastor Rice Small Grants Fund of Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP) Asia, accompanied by KpSHK conducted a Field Visit to Malasari Village (02-03, May 2019).

In addition to direct dialogue with the community, female farmers, and village leaders, Myna also conducted field visits to several locations of potential village environmental services.

Women’s Farmers and the Malasari Lestari Conservation Forest Farmers Group in the future will need further assistance in negotiations, lobbyings and partnership development with related regional institutions.



Top: Mrs. Lela Isroria, SE., Supports the GAGGA-KpSHK Program Prioritizing Woman’s Farmers in Conservation Partnerships.



Middle: Exploring the potential of the business of commodities in Nyuncung Hamlet, Malasari Village Led by Mrs. Elya - Nyuncung Woman’s Farmers.



Bottom: Ms. Mynabel T. Pomarin from Programme Officer – (GAGGA, NTFP-EP) Asia Field Visit to Malasari Village.

Sustainable livelihoods in ICCAs

REGIONAL LEARNING EXCHANGE VISIT

Article by Diana San Jose and Tanya Conlu
Photos by Arnie Ocampo

ICCAs are territories and areas that are conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, often referred to as “territories of life.” ICCAs are found in all cultures and ecosystems and are considered to be the oldest form of conservation on earth. These territories are intertwined with the identity, culture, and livelihoods of peoples who live in and help sustain these areas. In ICCAs, governance is through customary laws and practices, and self-determination is a distinct feature. They are characterized by a deep connection between the territory and the community where a functioning governance or institution exists and where governance decisions of the community contributes to the conservation and well-being of the entire population.

In line with the ICCA Consortium’s initiative of bringing sustainable livelihoods into focus, the first learning exchange event hosted by the ICCA South-east Asia Regional Learning Network took place in the Philippines last May 27-31, 2019. Members



of the ICCA Consortium travelled to Bukidnon province and Quezon City in the Philippines for a learning exchange visit.

Through workshops and film documentaries, discussions on the interconnectedness of livelihood, subsistence, enterprise and governance, as embodied in ICCAs, were tackled. A field visit and dialogue with the Kalandang Weavers of AGMI-HICU in Mintapod enabled participants to learn more about sustainable livelihoods from the actual experiences of the weavers of hinabol, a cloth



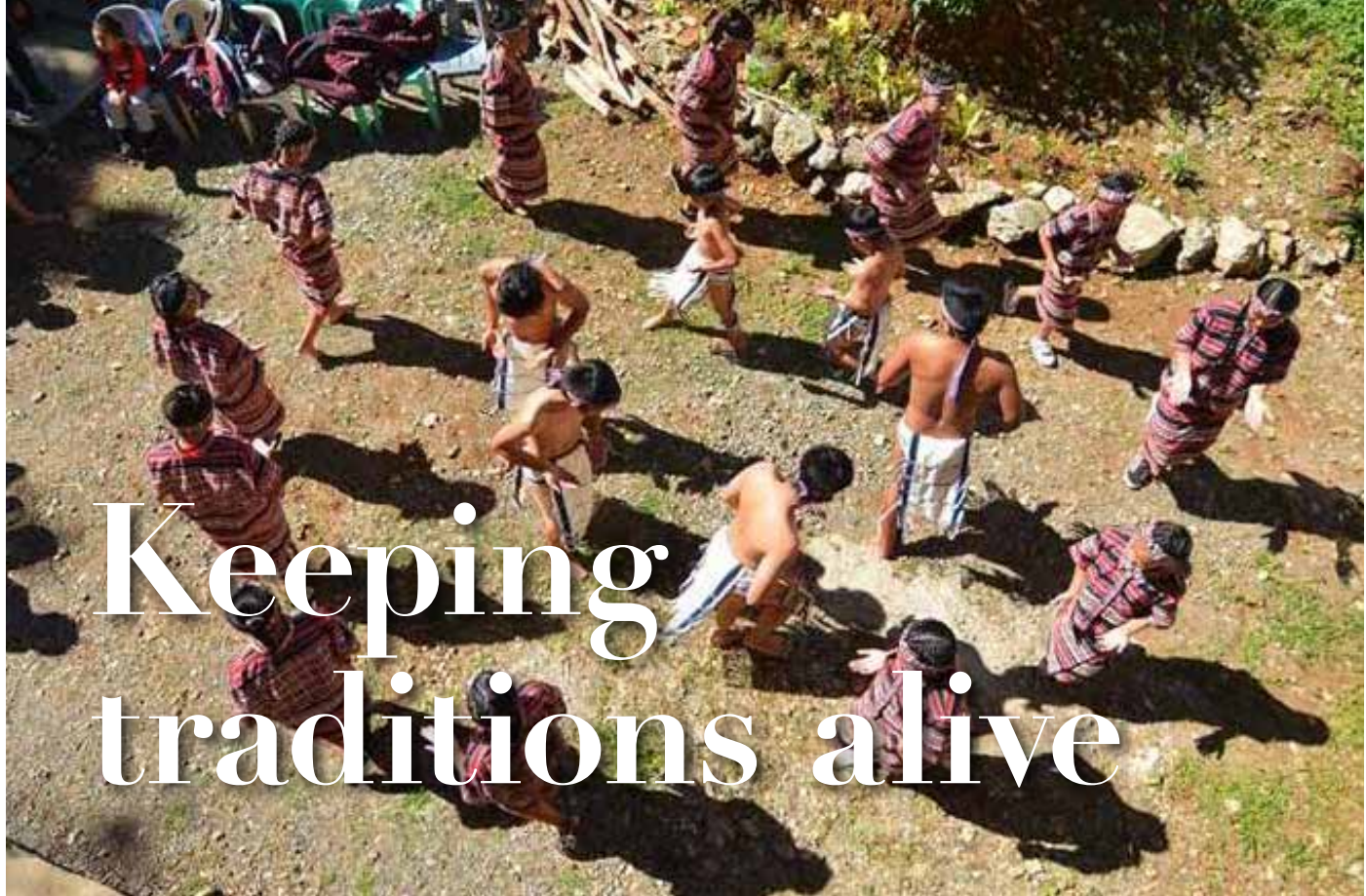
woven from abaca fiber by the Higaonon community. Over the years, the Higaonon have been able to create a business through the revival of this weaving tradition. Leaders of the community also talked to the delegation about their School of Living Tradition and Forest Walk practice as ways in which they are able to keep their culture alive and thriving, passed on from one generation to another.

NTFP-EP Philippines also shared about their long-time approach to CBNEs or community-based NTFP enterprises. Tools and strategies for starting, growing, and managing enterprises were shared. Through this session, participants learned about the whole enterprise process and the importance of establishing, growing and sustaining the enterprises, and how community-based enterprises are “doing well” – increasing income and expanding market base, “doing right” – observing fair trade principles, and “doing good” – paying particular attention to impact on the environment.

In this learning event, it was emphasized that sustainable livelihoods in the context of ICCAs comprise all elements that a community requires. These efforts should be supported by enabling policies to be able to respond to their needs and to maintain their custodian role towards their territory. It is this rootedness in and deep connection to the environment and resources which enable enterprises to become protected and sustained.

The importance of strong traditional governance and practices were highlighted throughout the five-day activity. In this learning exchange, a critical message that delegates took home with them was the importance of the connection between resources and the enterprise. Livelihoods are so closely linked to the culture and identity of people. Experiences of communities have shown that community-based enterprises can only thrive and become truly sustainable when they are rooted strongly in culture and traditional resource management and governance. Sustainable livelihoods in ICCAs show that local needs can be met while at the same time, conserving resources to ensure sustainability.

Participants during the regional learning visit on ICCAs.



Keeping traditions alive

AN ENHANCED APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Article by Maia Urata and Rex dela Pena
Photos by Rex dela Pena and Earl Diaz

It is always a vision to most of the community elders to pass-on the culture and traditions of their race to their community to preserve their identity and ensure that the younger generation can continue safeguarding their culture and practices.

The Philippines is a country with diverse and rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. However, most IP communities are vulnerable in that they are experiencing struggles on the recognition and respect of their culture in the country. In 2017, NTFP-EP Philippines officially included Culture Promotion in its program to fulfill achieving its vision of having a quality life for forest-dependent communities.

With the partnership of NTFP-EP Philippines and NCCA, the Enhanced School of Living Traditions became a medium to support the conservation, promotion as well as the revitalization of the culture and living traditions of partner communities.

THE SCHOOLS OF LIVING TRADITIONS

The Schools of Living Traditions was conceptualized in 1995. It traces its roots to UNESCO's call to preserve the living traditions of the indigenous people vis-a-vis NCCA's (National Commission for Culture and the Arts) mandate to conserve and promote the nation's cultural heritage.

The SLTs are community-managed cultural Learning Centers where Cultural Masters transmit cultural knowledge and traditional skills to the young members of the community for their appreciation and learning.

The Enhanced SLT is a five-year program of NCCA where selected cultural masters transmit their oral traditions, skills on craftsmanship, performing arts, knowledge, and social practices to their younger members who will eventually be the cultural bearers of their communities. At present, NTFP-EP Philippines is working with 28 SLT areas widely spread in different landscapes wherein most of them are IP communities and are implementing in different phases.

The design approach of an SLT varies in every community. Each has its own cultural identity and context. Therefore each cultural community determines its own strategies on the implementation and on the teaching-learning schemes. Starting the SLT has never been easy. The struggles were real, from social preparations up to the setting up of everything. There are strengths and difficulties encountered, depending on the capacities and capabilities of the communities. But everyone exerted efforts on the situation and embraced the learning process of setting each SLT. Learners religiously attended learning sessions, despite the limited accessibility and sometimes bad weather conditions. Cultural Masters patiently imparted their wisdom. The Local Coordinating Team helped with the writing and management of SLT. And to the whole community who generously shared their culture.

SLT was received well in spite of the adjustments at the early stage of the program. Through SLT, the communities became more aware of the cultural value of their art forms and sharing it with mainstream society. They gained self-confidence and were filled with pride when representing their cultural communities while performing in local and national events. The younger generations are more culturally-oriented. It also opens economic and tourism opportunities in their area. And, there are also efforts on submitting municipal and provincial ordinances to sustain SLT to safeguard their cultural heritage. Through all, the SLT aims to empower the community to claim ownership of their School of Living Traditions. Hence capability-building training interventions are needed to equip communities to become sustainable.



ENHANCED SCHOOLS OF LIVING TRADITIONS

Through the involvement of NTFP-EP Philippines in the development of the program implementation, the SLT program was enhanced as it no longer aims only to safeguard the traditional arts and cultural rights of indigenous people, but also “seeks to ensure the continuing success, viability, and sustainability of the SLT program.” This was part of a five-year development plan that was co-implemented by NTFP-EP Philippines from June 2017 to June 2019 covering the following areas from the North, Central, and South Philippines;



Ensuring the quality and value of forest products

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY FOREST ENTERPRISE INITIATIVES IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

Article by Robin Bustamante
Photos by Dr. Prasert Trakansuphakon and
Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer
Company Limited

How do we overcome the challenges of community enterprise initiatives? It's easy to understand why most people never associate lucrative businesses with forests and indigenous groups. We like to associate big businesses with the destruction of natural resources and the traditional way of life. But did you know there are businesses that not only benefit forest-based communities but also ensure that their environment thrives along with their commercial efforts?

These are what we call community-based forest enterprises or CFEs. Since indigenous communities often rely on forests and trees as sources of food, fuel, medicine, materials, and other commodities, it makes sense that they can be sources of income too. By definition, CFEs are usually overseen by a credible representative group that both manages the business and ensures the generated profits

are redistributed within the community. Plenty of studies and cases have already shown how these locally-owned forest business organizations provide significant economic, social, and environmental benefits to the community when presented with enough support.

Here's the catch—CFEs are often small-scale, limited in scope, and face problems competing in a modernized society. These communities usually lack the necessary capital and technical know-how to establish a presence with consumers or market their goods beyond their immediate localities. Their geographical isolation means they can easily fall victim to predatory middlemen. Meanwhile, the lack of awareness for CFEs means there is little policy support from governments to ensure their sustained business.

In response, various organizations and groups have pushed forward ideas that can help bridge the distance between forest communities and the consumer public. While there is no blanket solution that is guaranteed to work for every enterprise in every community in every country, there are a few steps that can be taken by key decision-makers in order to ensure the sustainability of CFEs.

Creating an enabling policy environment is among those steps deemed most vital. Government regulations that impose restrictions unfairly against traditional practices of indigenous communities may even exacerbate food and environmental security issues in forest communities. Take for example, the situation of the Hin Lad Nai community in Thailand. The community was first ostracized for their insistence on their traditional rotational farming method, which was often mistaken for illegal slash-and-burn agriculture. With the help of youth-led initiatives in social media, the Hin Lad Nai were not only able to improve their reputation in the region, they have also shared their knowledge and experiences with other indigenous communities across Thailand. Though their practices may be rooted in ancient knowledge, it has allowed them to communicate the story of their people, while

showcasing to the world that old doesn't always mean obsolete.

There is also a need to ensure that income from forest products can support the growing needs of forest-based communities. CFEs are often at a disadvantage compared to 'regular' small and medium commercial businesses. In many cases, the communities are unaware of value adding, a process wherein raw materials are processed to make products worth significantly more than the production costs. For example, if a community uses a forest product only for subsistence, they may be unaware of preservation methods that improve the shelf life of their products since they tend to consume them immediately. They might also be unaware of packaging methods to deliver products over long-distances. When the time comes to sell those products, they may become undesirable because they could be damaged or spoil far quicker than other commercial goods, thus driving prices and community profits down.

Since forest communities tend to live in geographic isolation, the people are also mostly unaware of the conventions we are used to in urbanized regions. They may be unaware of, for example, the need to



Indigenous forest-based communities depend on the forest for food, fuel, medicine, materials, and other commodities. Image courtesy of Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Limited.

have products tested and approved by government officials before they can be sold. They may not know about advertising practices or how to address fluctuating consumer demand. This is where concerned organizations can intervene and act as a liaison between the community members and the consumers. They can share their expertise and knowledge, create effective marketing strategies, and handle bureaucratic processes so the community can focus more on what they do best.

That scenario is exactly what the community producer company Aadhimalai has accomplished in India. Working closely with indigenous community members, the company developed effective business strategies to create market awareness and streamline the procurement and production process. The result? An estimated turnover of 11.7 million rupees (around 163,000 US dollars) for the benefit of more than 3000 families in 160 villages.

CFEs must also be empowered when it comes to dealing with corporations, conglomerates and other major enterprises. It is no secret that competition with huge commercial businesses with virtually limitless resources can be the death knell for small, fledgling enterprises. This scenario emphasizes the need for communities to work together and organize in order to make sure that their presence is felt in the consumer market and in the policy table. Such was the case for the smallholder farmers in Laos who own less than 10 hectares of land and rely almost entirely on family labor. Faced with competition from big agri-enterprises, they have organized themselves into a network which has allowed them to communicate efficiently, acquire support and

improve their skills in operating their businesses.

Green intermediaries can have a significant impact in empowering communities and providing credibility to enterprises. As the case was with CustomMade Crafts Center in the Philippines, much of their work involved design clinics, product development, consumer campaigns, and improving relations with business and government partners.

Concrete and sustained engagement with players in the different levels of the public and private sector is critical if we are to make CFEs an effective way of addressing social, economic, and environmental issues in forest communities. Community empowerment works in all levels of development. While those in the grassroots must continue exchanging knowledge and providing support to their respective communities, those working at the policy level must ensure they are guaranteed programs that support the formation, development and connectivity of CFEs in the region.

Finally, the general public can help by raising awareness on forest products and the communities that make them. Consider purchasing products that directly benefit indigenous groups and forest communities. Who knows? Maybe you'd find it better than the mass-produced goods you're used to buying before, except now you're also helping a hardworking community thrive living in the forests they call home.



Are we lagging in forest governance?



CIVIL SOCIETY, LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PRESENT THE MULTIPLE PATHWAYS FORWARD

Article and photos by
Dazzle Labapis

How Civil Society, local communities, and indigenous peoples can contribute to forest governance. Despite commendable, tried and tested initiatives in empowering communities towards forest governance, gaps, and lags in forest governance still remain because of several challenges. Often, inconsistencies in data, lack of capacity among local communities, and indigenous peoples are internal roadblocks. Additionally, the weak support from the government in recognition of customary land tenure and ICCAs in some countries and lack of trust and confidence in working together are also major impediments.

“People and the forest cannot be disconnected.” This was a strong message delivered by Noraeri Thungme from the Karen tribe, a member of Indigenous Women’s Network of Thailand (IWNT). Indigenous peoples, notably indigenous women,

are known to be the bearers of knowledge and keepers of the forest in Thailand. She shared the crucial role of women in managing their forests: not just in terms of protection but also in documentation, monitoring, and knowledge sharing. Most recently, they have established women forest, to strengthen their traditional way of sustainably managing resources

Remish Ekka of ANGNA echoed the experience in Thailand. He emphasized that communities govern the forest, they also protect the it. He cited that despite having the Forest Rights Act (FRA) enacted to empower communities, the government is still unwilling to give the forest rights to these communities, and cases of awarding lands to corporate groups for mining, as an example, persists. “We feel that there is a need to dialogue with the government administration, there is a need to talk to the

various government authorities so that we could also understand and they could also understand us, and that is where we believe that our rights will be given to us. Even if the government does not give our rights, we will try to take our rights by ourselves,” he remarked in asking the government to demand for the full implementation of the FRA.

Sabah still has a total of 50% forest cover and is home for 3.2M residents, around 61% of whom are indigenous peoples. From seascape to landscape, indigenous peoples are still practicing their customary practices and system. Mr. Gordon John Thomas of Partners of Community Organizations in Sabah (PACOS) Trust, also a member of an indigenous community in the coastal area of Sabah, shared their multi-stakeholder initiatives in Sabah working together to establish ICCAs or “territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Land Matrix is a global, open database and unbiased independent land monitoring initiative that crunches data for informed decision-making over land, respectful of the rights of traditional land users and analysis of forestry-related deals in Asia. Lorraine Ablan of AFA presented their experience of using the Land Matrix in Asia and how they have observed that using the tool has helped their partners in their research agenda, effective advocacy, and policy linked to identifying different types of investments on land, who is investing, and several conflicting land use in a specific country.

Several challenges in working together were highlighted. These include the lack of capacity for other organizations to engage in ICCA discussions; data are still not consolidated. There is also a gap in understanding and implementing policies. The need for knowledge exchange, and to share expertise and knowledge among the stakeholders is another.

It is vital to sustain and increase partnerships and collaborative work, build trust and confidence within and among various stakeholders: government, civil society, local communities, and indigenous peoples, recognize the role of women, and build their capacities to engage key stakeholders in policy development effectively. These are essential ingredients to have effective forest governance.





COMMUNITY LIVELIHOOD ASSESSMENT AND PRODUCT SCANNING (CLAPS)

FIRST STEPS TO COMMUNITY-BASED NTFP ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Community Livelihood Assessment and Product Scanning (CLAPS) aims to provide communities and organizations with an approach and tools in identifying and selecting products and services with high enterprise development potential. The course will also assess the readiness of communities in setting up viable community forest enterprises. The crucial steps from starting an assessment of the livelihood situation and scanning potential products, to the evaluation of resources, assessing community readiness, and prioritizing and mapping key non-timber forest products (NTFPs) will be taught in this training.

At the end of the course, the participants are expected to have an understanding and basic knowledge in using the following tools:

- Sustainable livelihood assessment tool
- Enterprise readiness assessment
- Resource scanning and mapping and market assessment
- Product/Service identification and prioritization

Community enterprise practitioners, NGOs supporting Community-Based NTFP Enterprises (CBNE) and other natural resource based enterprises managed by communities (coastal products and services based), and government staff with the mandate to support CBNEs, especially those that will actively support the establishment of CBNEs will benefit most from this training.

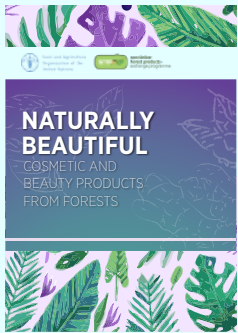
The training will be held in Núi Chúa National Park in Ninh Thuan province, Vietnam. Its final schedule is to be announced. The course will run for a total of five days: 3 days of lectures, 1 day of field workshop and 1 day of processing and preparing a re-entry plan.

- Day 0 Arrival in training venue/
Registration and Orientation
- Day 1 Sustainable Livelihood Analysis and
Enterprise Readiness Assessment
- Day 2 Resource and Market Scanning
- Day 3 Identification of Sustainable NTFPs
and Product/Service
- Day 4 Field Workshop
- Day 5 Processing, Re-entry Planning and Closing

Regular Package Rate for the 5-day training is USD 795 per person. The fee includes participation fee, course materials, field visits, meals for the duration of the training, accommodation (twin room sharing for 6 nights). Discounts are available for group registrations of at least 2 participants or to a limited number of participants coming from small, local organizations. For participants requiring a single room, an additional amount of 15 USD per night will be charged. **For more info, contact exceed@ntfp.org.**

FEATURED PUBLICATIONS

BOOK



NATURALLY BEAUTIFUL

The use of cosmetic and beauty products derived from forests has a history dating back more than 6,000 years. Traditional beauty products were almost invariably derived from plant, animal, or surface mineral sources, including many forest products. Globally, plant-based products are becoming increasingly popular choices in modern markets due in large part to the growth of more ethically and environmentally-minded consumers. Many facial creams, soaps, shower gels, and oils are increasingly relying on natural products from forests. FAO recently undertook case studies across Asia and the Pacific on the status and potential of products derived from forests for the cosmetic and fragrance sectors.

This upcoming publication demonstrates that prospects are very good for continued and increased use of NWFPs in beauty and cosmetic products. A variety of important challenges exist – NWFP producers of beauty and cosmetic products need to be continuously adapting and improving to ensure they maintain their advantages. However, solutions to most of these challenges can be found.

FILM



UNTANGLING THROUGH HINABOL WEAVING: COMMUNITY FORESTRY ENTERPRISES (CFES) PERSPECTIVES ON FOREST PRODUCTS TRADE AND MARKETS

The film gives a perspective on how forest-based communities such as the Higaonon people in Bukidnon, Philippines, are deeply connected to their forest environment. Untangling through Hinabol Weaving sparks conversations around the relationship between enterprise sustainability, the tribe's sacred rituals, and their collective reverence for their forests.

Untangling Through Hinabol Weaving was released during the Asia Pacific Forestry Week 2019 Stream 4 partner event in Incheon, South Korea, entitled "Situation and trends in forest products trade last 18 June 2019. The film was produced by NTFP-EP Asia with funding support from the Swiss Development Cooperation through the ASEAN-Swiss Partnership for Social Forestry and Climate Change.



What are your thoughts about this issue? Do you have interesting stories of people and forests that you'd like us to feature in Voices from the Forest?

Send in your contributions, comments, and suggestions:

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