



# Profiting from Pandan

BY BENEDICTO Q. SANCHEZ, BROAD INITIATIVES FOR NEGROS DEVELOPMENT, INC. (BIND)

“Seeing the trees for the forests” sums up a myopic view of tropical rainforests. That is why big-time illegal resource users nationwide poach only hardwoods. They only see trees, not forests.

But the experience of Barangay Bagacay, Calatrava in northeastern Negros Occidental is proving that there is more to forests than trees. The mountain communities who saw beyond them are fast improving their income and their quality of life. They saw that non-timber forest products (NTFPs) can serve as raw materials for cottage industries or community-based enterprises.

International forestry expert Charles Peters defines NTFPs as biological resources other than timber which are harvested from either natural or managed forests. Examples include fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, dyes, ornamental plants, etc., which harvesters generally process into marketable products.

While NTFPs are often gathered from natural forests, others may be produced with varying degrees of cultivation and domestication, either within a forest ecosystem or as part of a planted forest system such as a plantation or an agroforest (Wilkinson and Elevitch, *Non-Timber Forest Products for Pacific Islands*).

Although the fibrous pandan (*Pandanus tectorius*) favors rocky and sandy shores of atolls and high islands, the species has been introduced in secondary growth forests and grasslands, as in the case of Barangay Bagacay.

While pandan has many other uses, it has almost one exclusive function in the barangay: raw material for high-quality bags. Trained by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in 1997, the Bagacay women and men farmers make various kinds of bags from pandan, Individual households produce eight to twelve bags a week, which a local merchant buys in

several hundreds every two weeks. The community-based merchant doubles as a means of quality-control, purchasing only those bags which passed inspection.

So lucrative is their community-based industry that their products are sold in Manila and Cebu, and even exported to Italy! The bags not meeting quality standards are usually sold in Bacolod public markets and downtown streets. The classier ones are sold in supermalls like Robinson’s of Bacolod.

## **Social and environmental benefits**

Most households have fulltime employment. The fathers, mothers and older children congregate in caves at least five days a week to clean, slice and weave the bags. They use the caves to control moisture and enhance the leaves’ suppleness.

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*Not By Timber Alone (nba)* is a semi-annual newsletter of the Philippine Non-Timber Forest Products – Task Force (NTFP–TF), a collaborative network of NGOs and Peoples Organizations (POs) working with local communities on developing their NTFP-based livelihoods. The Task Force works on NTFP development in the context of sustainable forest management and community empowerment. The Task Force is hosted by the Upland Marketing Foundation, Inc. (UMFI).

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Workday is thus also family day, a stark contrast with other upland communities where the father or mother has to leave home for days to work in the sugarcane haciendas during the lean months between the *tanum* (planting) and *karga-tapas* (harvest) season.

To increase production, the community has adopted a factory-style, assembly line specialized division of labor. The lesser skilled workers are assigned to harvesting while others concentrate on dyeing, which is often done at home. Those with nimble fingers slice and weave the semi-processed dried leaves into pre-designed bags. They thus overcame the usual problems besetting community-based enterprises, often identified as small-scale production, higher-priced products of poor quality, with a penchant for late deliveries.

The pandan bags also enabled the pandan weaver to improve their quality of life. Because of increased incomes, the farmers were able to renovate their houses, using sturdy materials like G.I. sheets or cement. With this additional income, some families have even managed to send their kids to college. Work is also less tiring inside the naturally "air-conditioned" caves compared with working on their farms.

The traditional *bayanihan* spirit (mutual exchange of labor) is likewise strengthened among the various generations, and between male and female Bagacayans. They realized that they are able to meet the production requirements with economies of scale if most, if not all, households pitch in.

Environmentally, there is less pressure on agriculture to encroach on secondary growth forests. To ensure a steady supply of raw materials, the community has established pandan plantations near their caves.

With these values, communities now view forests focusing less on trees for timber utilization, and more on NTFPs for their economic development. Either way, economics and the environment come out as both winners. **nbtta**

## OIL PALM PLANTATIONS

# Better or Bitter?

By MARVIN GEOLINA, FATHER VINCENT CULLEN TULUGAN LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT CENTER

**I**no hayan ha kayo sa igpamula doon tain ha kabilin day ha bugta? (What is that tree to be planted in our ancestral land?)

That was the question asked of me personally by *Amay Mantangkilan*, chieftain *datu* of the Higaonon tribal community of Mintapod. Amay and the rest of the Agtulawon Mintapod Higaonon Cumadon (AGMIHICU) community heard rumors of the alleged plan to establish oil palm plantations in various barangays of Impasug-ong, Bukidnon particularly Hagpa where their ancestral domain is located.

The government supports and has budget allocations for oil palm agribusiness expansions in most parts of Northern Mindanao. It is a tool for development in its drive for peace stability in conflict-affected provinces. In its regulations, government reclassified the oil palm from an agro-industrial crop to an agroforestry category to ease access in the highlands.

### Initiative

In line with this, the Non-Timber Forest Product - Exchange Programme for Southeast Asia (NTFP-EP) in collaborative working alliance with other support groups has taken the initiative of providing local communities with needed information to making better-informed decisions of the planned oil palm plantations in Bukidnon.

Along with the Father Vincent Cullen Tulugan and Development Center (FVCTLDC), a community-based NGO and the Higaonon tribes of Bukidnon, the NTFP - EP conducted a forum last 28 October 2003 in Malaybalay City. Supported by the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC)-Kasama sa Kalikasan and Indigenous Peoples Apostolate (IPA-Bukidnon), the activity was conceptualized to exchange

comprehensive information on the economic, social and environmental impacts of palm oil industry. The forum was dubbed as "*Oil Palm: A Sustainable Livelihood Alternative for the Lumad?*" The Mindanao-wide forum was participated in by various NGOs, POs, LGUs, government agencies, church-based organizations, media, representatives from Malaysian and Indonesian-based support organizations to impart their knowledge and own experiences about oil palm.

The one-day activity was divided into three sessions with discussions and open forum. Governance and palm oil development in Bukidnon were discussed in the first session by the LGU of Impasug-ong. Plans for oil palm in Region 10 were also presented by the Philippine Coconut Authority (PCA), the agency mandated to undertake regulation and promotion of oil palm industries.

The experiences of similar oil palm plantations in Mindanao wherein 18,000 hectares had already been established in the provinces of Agusan and Sultan Kudarat were reported in the second session. The last session dealt with the social and environmental impacts of oil palm in Indonesia and Malaysia, the leaders in production and trading of one of the commonly used vegetable oils in the world.

### Municipal plans

Municipal councilor Myron Tortola, chairman on the Committee on Environment and Ecological Development and Committee on Agriculture, presented the whole oil palm plan of the local government of Impasug-ong, Bukidnon. They have designed a five-year development plan called Higa-onon Agro-Based Alternative Industrialization (HIAGI) and plan to develop an Agro-Industrial Trade Center (AITC). It focuses on utilizing vast areas of different

barangays, including Hagpa, with an initial 300 hectares of oil palm plantation and aims to expand to 3,000 - 4,000 hectares in the next three years to meet the requirement of putting up a palm oil mill.

### **“Tree of peace” or of chaos?**

“The oil palm is projected by the national government as a tree of peace in Mindanao,” PCA Regional Director for Northern Mindanao Luis G. Cruz said. In connection with the government’s peace building process, oil palm plantations are a way of inviting investors into Mindanao’s troubled provinces.

Oil palm has the highest oil productivity per hectare among other vegetable oil sources, Cruz noted. There is a growing demand in various markets with 30,000 tons of palm oil being imported for domestic use yearly. Mindanao is suitable for oil palm plantations due to its tropical climate. However, it is less tolerant to varying agro-climatic conditions and cannot be intercropped. Plantations also require good road networks as fruit bunches are heavy to transport and require processing within 48 hours.

Cruz stressed that there would be massive social engineering to attain minimum economic size production, because it requires huge land usage and a big group of landowners pooling together. It needs strong social organization to make it contiguous and viable. Also, there are limited financing windows for oil palm growers.

However, the PCA in Northern Mindanao has adopted the following policies and directions on oil palm development throughout the region: planting of oil palm should not be done in coconut areas; production in areas covered by land reform and ancestral lands should be under contract growership scheme; identification of market niche for palm oil to minimize competition in the local market and monitoring and regulation in the use of chemical inputs and likes since the culture of oil palm requires intensive use of these

inputs and may cause environmental degradation.

Billy dela Rosa of AFRIM of Davao City suggested otherwise; that the oil palm might be called a “tree of chaos” because of the resulting social displacement.

He noted that the Philippines’ history of plantation development is sated with stories of indigenous people being deprived of their rights to their ancestral domain. In Davao, for example, Alsa Lumad was created by the military to convince people to plant oil palm and refrain entrance of New Peoples Army. He mentioned unreasonable and usurious



Tony Sebastian of Aonyx International explaining the environmental impacts of oil palm plantations in Malaysia

contracts between plantation companies and landowners in terms of very low rentals. Competition to coconut is most likely probable because of the palm kernel oil, a by-product of the oil palm tree that is similar to coconut oil. “We have 12 million coco farmers, what happens to them? It is our traditional crop,” he asked.

A PAFID representative raised the issue of unclear production sharing agreements with investors still getting the biggest benefits. Possible displacement is most probable, as in the case of Bohol, if *lumads* are tasked to work with high-tech equipment. “How much more *lumads* who still have no land security?” he asked.

### **Human rights violation**

Project Coordinator Greg Hontiveros of the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC) shared the oil palm experience in Agusan del Sur. Originally

nucleus state plantations owned by NDC-Guthrie States were established in 1981. Lost commands had been hired to displace land settlers particularly the *lumads*. Human rights violations were reported and proven after investigation by the British Parliament where the P320 million loan was obtained to finance the plantation. Upon recommendation of the fact-finding committee, the lost commands were removed from the plantation as security guards and replaced by another agency. In the first year of operation, no less than a dozen died due to the land acquisition process for about 8,000 hectares.

A Memorandum of Understanding had already been signed no longer as a Nucleus State but for contract growing in Agusan. “What will happen to (the) situation of people is something we have to think about. Due to what happened in the past wherein many have died, we need to analyze if it’s really profitable and its effect on people,” Hontiveros ended.

### **False promises**

Dela Rosa also appealed the need to be critical because the main targets for oil palm plantations are CADC or CADT areas, which are big wide contiguous areas and controlled by councils of elders. Companies might directly target negotiate with the council of elders with false promises.

Bobby Lingating of IPEX warned from an experience in Zamboanga de Sur that there were arrangements made between the DENR and some politicians to register IP’s claimed ancestral domain into Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) agreements to facilitate entry of oil palm plantations. “*Gisuholan ang mga tribal leaders at gipapirma* (Tribal leaders were bribed and made them sign),” he revealed.

Edna Espinosa of the Social Action Center in Wao, Lanao del Sur voiced the government’s negligence in administering contracts entered into between the IPs and companies, which frequently become deceptive and vague in favor of the latter.



# In Hot Pursuit of Indian Bees!

BY ARLAN M. SANTOS, NTFP-TF

“Tea has taken over our lives. Too much has changed ... How can I speak of the old days without tears?”

- OLD KURUMBA WOMAN, FROM “HONEY HUNTERS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS,”  
KEYSTONE FOUNDATION

Thus is the plight of the Kurumba tribe of Nilgiris, India. One of the oldest honey hunters in Nilgiris, the tribe is increasingly becoming dependent on the market economy. Honey hunting, once a traditional practice, is fast disappearing. The dwindling of forest and bee foraging areas has drastically reduced the numbers of those practicing honey hunting. The special bond that the Kurumba once had with the rock bee and its ecology is fading fast from the memory of the new generations.

Keystone Foundation stepped in, and through years of persistence has been instrumental in reviving this fading tradition. Its inspiring work on honey is a remarkable case of resource management of a non-timber forest product. Keystone’s strategy towards rural development is a partnership with

tribal communities, among them the Kurumbas. Taking on an integrated approach, it has worked with the Kurumbas in the conservation of wild bees, beekeeping, honey processing and product development, and marketing.

## **Catching up with the bees**

This partnership is a rich learning ground for other community-based and peoples organizations. Through the Non-Timber Forest Products–Exchange Programme, various partner organizations participated in a study tour to the Keystone Foundation in Nilgiris, India last 25 October- 2 November 2004. These organizations were identified as having abundant honey supply and were working with tribal communities in their respective localities. These included the NATRIPAL (United Tribes of Palawan) and the NTFP-Task Force in the Philippines; and the Dian Tama and the Riak Bumi in Indonesia.

Participants aimed to learn the technical procedures in honey production. More importantly, they developed an understanding of

appropriate interventions in conserving bees as source of seasonal income by the tribal community.

Honey as a non-timber forest resource is widely gaining recognition because of its known nutritional value and health benefits, as well as being an important subsistence and livelihood of many communities. Conservation and utilization of honey is a painstaking task and the experience would not be complete without the sensation of their burning sting on your skin as part of the process!

## **Team building with the colony**

The participants had a firsthand taste of what Keystone has done to attain the “nirvana state” in producing and marketing their honey products. It is evident that the fundamental element of Keystone’s success is their building up a working relationship with the tribal communities (and the bees of course - the ultimate source of honey!).

At the Keystone office, participants experienced hands-on processing, coding, packing and testing of honey to ensure its quality. Other important areas studied were systems in pricing and marketing.

Meticulous documentation in all aspects of honey production and marketing play an essential role in resource management. Keystone has established baseline information about the honey hunter, the type of bees, honey taste, area of source, and method of hunting and harvesting.

The participants also had the opportunity to visit and interact with the Kurumba Tribe. Discussed were the bee habitat in the participants’ locality,



the traditional honey hunting and harvesting practices, and Keystone's intervention in the area. The visit underscored that traditional honey hunting is a daunting and risky task, with local hunters scaling high cliffs with just ropes protecting them from falling.

**Reality stings!**

Overall, the study tour highlighted that pursuit of knowledge on bees and its honey is a complex process because it encompasses ecology, economics,

culture and the people. The participants now are also equipped with a broad spectrum of possible interventions and techniques to improve their honey quality and to conserve this resource effectively. But as the old cliché goes, the journey doesn't end there! These learnings are just the first stride and a long road ahead waits to be traversed with the people and the bees, armed with a duffel bag of homework from Keystone! *nbta*

• **MAIN PHOTO:** In community-based beekeeping, Keystone utilizes beeswax foundations as a starter for its beehives.

• **INSET PHOTOS (from L-R):** (1) The "queen cup" (the conspicuous yellow protrusion), artificially grafted into the beehive by its keeper, signals the colony to produce a queen in an otherwise queenless colony; this is vital for a colony's continuity, (2) Honey is filtered to remove impurities and other contaminants to improve quality, (3) Labels for honey indicate honey flavor, batch control number, production and expiration dates, (4) A discussion with the Kurumbas on their indigenous honey hunting practices, (5-6) Heri of Riak Bumi undertakes beeswax preparation for candle making and wax foundation; Inday of NATRIPAL tries her hand at making beeswax candles.

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**Environmental effects**

Anthony Sebastian, director of Aonyx Environmental of Sarawak, Malaysia tackled among others the environmental consequences of oil palm plantations. These include loss of forest ecosystems as a result of complete conversion of forest, fragmentation of remaining forest blocks, loss of animal and plant species, compromised viability of remaining forests and species and loss of permanent forest estate (timber resources).

Another problem is the loss of functioning life support systems due to soil nutrient loss, hydrological change and degradation of water sources brought about by the intensive use of chemicals.

**Do things right**

"Oil palm is profitable, (but) it has negative impacts however. Clear land use planning is very important for the oil palm plantation. Balance of the good and negative side is necessary to have sustainable industry. Use information for making decisions. We are not calling for rejecting oil palm. But do things right.

Success comes with a price," the Malaysian finally advised.

Rudly Lumuru of SawitWatch in Indonesia where the oil palm industry has performed well economically but failed socially and environmentally, recommended the proper institutionalization of the oil palm industry in the Philippines in order for it to survive.

**The challenge**

Favorable economic effects of oil palm plantations are apparent. Social and environmental impacts are also evident but are simply disregarded by some. Such plantations cause environmental degradation, social injustice and human rights violations. While claiming to alleviate poverty, provide unemployment and allow for infrastructure improvement for local inhabitants, palm oil plantations have mainly served local elite groups and large-scale companies.

Since forests are the home of indigenous peoples, they must face those who in the name of "development" try

to conquer their land and resources. In spite of the threat posed by the oil palm industry, a number of multinational companies as well as the national and local government units continue to promote this crop. Within this context, NGOs have a vital role in much needed information dissemination and campaigning activities to support local people struggling at the ground level defending their rights against this plantation invasion.

Now that Amay's question has been finally answered, when asked what are his views, he proudly shared "The forest is our livelihood and sacred inheritance that our Higaonon forefathers have passed on to us."

He continued: "*Kahaldok kay ha masagulan ko iling tain ha pamulahon kay huda day hain kapalimani down ho gin apuan day*" (We're afraid to grow and mix this kind of tree in our ancestral land for we never heard about it from our ancestors). *nbta*

Reference: MindaNews, 30 October 2003

# Kasaganaan or Kasiraan?

NI ISAGANI SANTOS, NAGKAKAISANG MGA TRIBU NG PALAWAN (NATRIPAL)

Ang **Tagbunsaing Lake** ay isang lawang matatagpuan sa Berong sa Bayan ng Quezon. Matagal nang panahon na ang lawang ito ay mayamang pinagkukunan ng mga katutubong Tagbanuang naninirahan dito ng kanilang ikinabubuhay. Mga humigit kumulang isang daang hektarya ang lawak nito kaya naman tunay na kayang buhayin ng mga likas yaman mula rito ang mga katutubong naninirahan sa tabi nito. Ayon sa kanila, ang kayamanang matatagpuan dito ay tulad ng alimango, sugpo at isda. Anila, malaking biyaya ng Maykapal ang lawang ito para sa kanila dahil kahit na hindi mga katutubo ay nakikinabang rito, pati na nga mga mangingisdang hindi makalaot kung masama ang panahon ay nabibiyayaan din ng yaman nito.

Dahil sa angking kasaganaan ng lawang ito ay may ilang mga negosyante na rin ang sumubok na angkinin ang pagmamay-ari nito upang gawing fishpond, na ayon sa kanila ay magdudulot ng ibayong kaunlaran sa mga tagarito lalo na't kung ang maalagaan ay mamahaling mga isda tulad ng lapu-lapu, sugpo at banagan. Nguni't ang panukalang ito ay mahigpit na tinutulan ng mga katutubong Tagbanua rito na sinusuportahan naman ng konsehong pambarangay ng Barangay Berong. May dalawang beses nang may sumubok ng ganitong panukala nguni't ito ay pawang nangabigong makuha ang pagsang-ayon ng mga katutubo. Nakakatuwang tingnan ang ganitong kalakasan ng isang samahan kung saan may kakayahan na silang gumawa ng hakbang na labanan ang mga bantag pumapasok sa kanila.

Nguni't sa pagtatapos ng dekada ay dumating sa Berong ang sinasabi nilang kaunlaran handog ng pamahalaan sapagka't nagkaroon ng ng kalsada at tulay. Anupa't ang lahat ay naging masaya dahil hindi na sila nahihirapang lumuwas sa bayan lalo na kung masama ang panahon dahil nagkaroon na ng mga pampasaherong dyipni ang yumayaot dito. Naibebenta na nila sa bayan ang kanilang mga produkto na nangangahulugan ng pag-unlad ng aspetong sosyo-ekonomiko.

Dalawang taon ang lumipas at naramdaman ng mga residente ang pag-unti ng mga huli sa loob ng lawa. Hindi na ito katulad ng dating nanagana sa yamang-dagat. Kumapal na ang putik sa

loob ng lawa at bumaho pati ang lumot sa loob na dati ay hindi nila nararanasan. Ang kolbert sa tulay ang hinihinala nilang siyang dahilan dahil mataas kesa dating daluyan ng tubig ang pagkakakabit nito. Nakita ng mga katutubo ritong dahil mataas nga ang elebasyon nito ay hindi makuhang ilabas lahat ng latak sa loob ng lawa. Ito ang naging dahilan kung bakit kumonti ang kanilang huli.

*... hindi lahat ng kaunlaran ay nakakabuti sa lahat.*

*May mga bagay na pinakikinabangan ng karamihan nguni't sa kabila nito ay nag-iwan ng masamang epekto sa kapaligiran.*

Sa ngayon ay hindi na totoo ang kasaganaan para sa mga Tagbanua magmula nang maabot ng kalsada ang kanilang lugar may dalawang taon na ang nakararaan. Nasira ang magandang pinamamahayan ng mga yamang dagat na ito gawa ng kolbert na inilagay rito. Kumapal nang masyado ang putik at pati ang mga lumot ay namamaho na dahil hindi makalabas bunga ng mataas na nebelasyon ng nasabing culvert. Wala na ring mahuli ang mga nangingisda rito. Ayon sa obserbasyon ng mga katutubo rito, sa buwan ng Disyembre

ay kusang nagsasara ang lawang ito at kahit buksan mo ito ngayon ay magsasara't-magsasara rin ito kinabukasan. Sa panahon umanong nakasara ito ay dito lumalaki ang mga isda't ibang semilyang nasa sa loob ng lawa. Kusa rin itong nabubuksan sa buwan ng Agosto kung saan sa panahong ito ay malakas na ang baha. Sa mga panahong bukas ang lawang ito ay natatangay palabas ang iba't-ibang uri ng lumot na sinasalubong naman ng mga iba't-ibang uri ng isda at yamang dagat bilang pagkain nila. Pumapasok na rin ang iba't-ibang uri ng semilya at dito na naninirahan hanggang sa lumaki.

Ang himutok ng mga residente rito, sana raw ay sinangguni rin sila ng kontraktor na gumawa ng nasabing kolbert noon, sana ay hindi nasira ang magandang *vegetation* ng nasabing lugar. Sa ngayon ay nagtatanong sila kung kaninong ahensiya dapat tumugon sa ganitong suliranin. Ang hiling nila, sana ay maibalik sa dating level ng lawa upang mapanumbalik ang dating porma nito. Kahit tulay na lamang ang ilagay roon upang maibalik sa dati ang daloy ng tubig nang sa gayon ay manumbalik ang dating yaman ng lawa. Nakipag-ugnayan na rin sila sa munisipyo nguni't walang katugunan ang mga ito. Ang sabi nga ilan "Nagkaroon nga sila ng kalsada at tulay, pero nasira naman ang lawang pinagkukunan nila ng ikabubuhay. Sana raw ay marinig din sila ng pamahalaan sa kanilang hinaing at maisaayos ang lahat."

Bunga ng problemang ito, ang BANRAK ay nagparating ng karaingan sa iba't-ibang ahensiya ng pamahalaan upang matugunan ang naging problema nilang ito nguni't hindi ito napakinggan. Maging si Dr. Abe Padilla ay tumulong ng magparating ng problemang ito sa pamahalaang nasyonal. Mabuti na lamang at noong iparating ito kay Gob. Joel Reyes ay agad itong inaksiyunan. Ang panandaliang solusyon ay ibalik sa dating lebel ang daluyan ng tubig. Inatasan niya si Engr. Charlie Factor ng Provincial Engineering Office (PEO) na bisitahin at itaya ang materyales na magagamit. Nangakong magbibigay ng halagang P30,000 upang magawa ang nasabing mga kolbert. Maging ang ELAC ay tumulong na rin upang malutas ang problemang ito dahil noong sinisimulang gawin ng mga residente ang kolbert ay hindi pa nailalabas ang pera galing sa pamahalaang probinsiyal, kaya nagpaluwal muna si Bobby Chan ng pera para magawa lang ang nasabing gawain.

Sinimulang gawin ito noong pangalawang linggo ng Mayo at nitong Hunyo 10 nga ay ganap nang natapos ang paglalagay ng kolbert sa pamamagitan ng pagbabayanihan ng mga residente. Limang porsiyento rito ang hindi mga katutubo nguni't tumulong sa mga nasabing gawain. Matapos ang ilang buwan lamang ay muling naramdaman ng mga katutubo rito ang pagdami ng kanilang huling hipon at iba na lalong nagpatibay sa kanilang hinala na ang kolbert talaga ang naging dahilan ng pagkasira ng kanilang lawa.

Sa mga pangyayaring ito, nakikita nating hindi lahat ng kaunlaran ay nakakabuti sa lahat. May mga bagay na pinakikinabangan ng karamihan nguni't sa kabila nito ay nag-iwan ng masamang epekto sa kapaligiran. Kaya makakabuti sanang magkaroon talaga ng masusing konsultasyon sa mga katutubong apektado bago pasimulan ang anumang proyekto lalo na't ito'y napapaloob sa lupaing ninuno. **nbta**

## DIALOGUE WITH THE DENR

# Exploratory Talks on NTFP Policies & Programs

BY MARIA CRISTINA S. GUERRERO, NTFP-TF

Informal discussions with Forest Management Bureau (FMB) Director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Romeo Acosta, and the head of the Ancestral Domain Management Program (ADMP) of the FMB, Joey Austria, lead to exploratory talks on NTFPs between the FMB and the NTFP-Task Force on 16 February 2004.

Present were representatives from the following divisions: Forest Economics, Reforestation, Natural Forest Management, Research and Statistics, Forest Policy Section, Planning, and Forest Inventory. This was the first meeting of its kind where Task Force members from Kalahan Educational Foundation (Nueva Vizcaya), Broad Initiatives for Negros Development (Negros Occidental), and *Nagkakaisang Mga Tribu ng Palawan* (NATRIPAL) discussed policy issues with the different division representatives of the FMB.

One main issue was herbal medicines. Pastor Delbert Rice (KEF) said that more upland groups and farming communities were gathering and/or planting medicinal plants and selling them to the commercial markets like ALTERMED. Crissy Guerrero (NTFP-TF) raised, however, that though there was an observed trend in more farmers planting and selling medicinal plants, new directives by the Department of Health had led to the transfer of medicinal plants like *ampalaya* (*Mormodica charantia*) from the traditional herbal medicine list to the folkloric list. This directive was implemented due to the incomplete status of clinic tests on *ampalaya* despite the fact that the World Health Organization, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, among others, officially recognize *ampalaya* for its use in regulating blood sugar. This delisting has resulted in dwindling orders for *ampalaya* and the loss of income to numerous farmers.

The TF members and secretariat requested for representation through the FBIAC, Forest-based Industry Advisory Committee, under the DENR which discusses such issues. Genesis Francisco of the Forest Economics division also explained that the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has a special committee addressing the policy issues on herbal medicines. As a representative of the DENR in that committee, he agreed to request for NTFP-TF to be invited to the DOST committee as well as the FBIAC.

Isagani Santos, a Tagbanua from Palawan, shared issues faced by the member indigenous communities of the NATRIPAL federation. One major issue is the DENR issuing permits for *almaciga* (*Agathis philippinensis*) concessions to migrants without free and prior informed consent (FPIC) agreements of the concerned indigenous communities. Mr. Austria shared that there were already instructions not to renew concessions of migrants within ancestral domains without FPICs. He requested a list of these concession holders. Miss Guerrero suggested that new guidelines could be made for IP communities applying for *almaciga* concessions since the existing ones are quite extensive and require significant amount of capital.

Benedicto Sanchez of BIND ended the discussions by raising the issue of baselines studies for NTFPs. He mentioned that the DENR only had inventory/assessment protocols for rattan resources. He felt that without concrete policies and procedures, this was in effect "a license for open access." On the other hand, he raised the issue that DENR assessment protocols usually involve inventories with a certain degree of biometric rigor. Mr. Sanchez challenged the group to develop assessment methodologies that are both practical and reliable. Pastor Rice reminded the group not to underestimate indigenous knowledge systems and practices in assessing resources, even those not requiring strict inventories, as illustrated in Ancestral Domain Sustainable and Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs).

Domeng Bacalla, the head of the Community-based Forest Management (CBFM) division suggested that issues raised be discussed in the joint committee being formed to harmonize policies between the DENR and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). The NTFP-TF requested an invitation to meetings of the said joint committee so that communities and NGO members could provide further inputs in the harmonization of policies.

The NTFP-TF's inclusion in various working committees and the proposed review activity on NTFP concessions, as well as other recommendations are steps toward resolving policy conflicts and program concerns of forest-based communities. **nbta**

# The Highs & Lows of Crafts Marketing

BY NOLA P. ANDAYA, NTFP-TF

At the NTFP-TF Crafts Center, we are going through the highs and lows of crafts marketing... and we are very excited!

## The high end of things

We are now implementing the HIGH VALUE, LOW VOLUME Crafts Marketing strategy – yes, we mean coming up with products of high value but produced in low volumes. Taking into consideration factors that are not usually present in marketing mainstream crafts – limited volume capacity, cultural value of crafts, environmental sustainability and community integrity – we decided that high value- low volume is the way to go. By concentrating on high-end products, income requirements of crafts producers can be met without adding pressure to their traditional way of life nor to their environmental resources.

In general, production capacity of IP communities is moderate due to a way of life tied to traditions and a regulated access to raw materials. Because of other factors such as distance from the market and higher labor costs resulting in high production costs, it is best to position the products in the higher end market which is capable of absorbing this cost and will give a higher profit margin to the artisan.

Indigenous handicrafts have also become commonplace due to indiscriminate application to modern, mass produced products. This has caused a decrease in the craft's perceived value, undermining the intricate and tedious process artisans undertake to create the masterpiece. Through the HV-LV strategy, crafts' value is hoped to be elevated through the proper matching of traditional skill and raw materials to top contemporary design and function that highlight or bring out the innate value of the culture bound craft, therefore fairly compensating the labor and historical/cultural value that goes into it.

## FATE and FAME

It was at F.A.M.E. that the fate of this strategy was sealed. Through the invitation and support of the Mangyan Heritage Center, NTFP-TF and the Mangyan Mission had the chance to present Mangyan crafts to an international audience and a sophisticated and modern lot of designers at the 2003 FAME, the largest international trade fair on Philippine furniture and crafts organized by CITEM. At this fair we met designer, Tracie Anglo-Dizon. This young and proactive designer shares our passion to elevate IP traditional crafts to the level it should be in – a level that values the *hand* in handicrafts. Inspired by a brand

called LOSA (London – South Africa)<sup>1</sup> that she came across on one of her trips to the UK, Tracie and three other designers readily teamed up with NTFP-TF to create a line that will be guided by the high value - low volume mantra.

## Hopping on the Brand Wagon

This line, which will open up new niches for IP crafts thus increasing the demand, and will range from fashion to homeware and lifestyle. The line shall be a blend of craftsmanship perfected through generations and generations of practicing artisans and the sophistication and high demand of contemporary design and functionality.

This line will be launched under a brand that is currently being designed and developed with the help of the four volunteer designers. This brand will project a way of life that reconciles urban taste for sophistication and quality and an awareness of environmental and social issues – a lifestyle that a very demanding and intelligent consumer would want to adhere to.

The new line will be presented to the public by the third quarter of this year in a Crafts Conference.

As I end this article, I remember a song that I grew up with, a song from the Disney animation Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. It goes “Hi-ho, hi – ho off to work we go...” With a little revision, it can be a formula for IP crafts marketing: “High-low, high-low, off to market we go... (whistling sound).” *nbtta*

<sup>1</sup> An initiative of top auction house Sotheby's and South African artisans to create a wider market for South African craft workers by applying modern designs to the traditional South African crafts: beadwork, woven coiled grass basket-work, telephone wire work, wood carving and embroidery.



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