



SPARK newsletter



Promoting community-based approaches in natural resource management in South East Asia

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Please see page 6 for a survey questionnaire on learning lessons.

The SPARK newsletter is a quarterly publication produced in Thai, Bahasa Indonesia and English aimed at practitioners of community-based natural resource management in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. It is received by about 900 organizations in these countries. The newsletter is intended to serve as a networking tool to encourage the sharing of knowledge, experiences, ideas and cooperation amongst different groups implementing CBNRM activities in the three program countries.

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Livelihoods and Markets

By Ronet Santos, VSO and Mariel de Jesus, ESSC

The livelihoods of people in even the most isolated sections of the forest or the most inaccessible small islands are linked to markets. As originally, defined a market is "a meeting together of people for trade by purchase or sale." But most people understand the term as "a public place where such meeting is held."

No one can produce all of his/her requirements in life. No community can survive on its production alone. Communities have to depend on other communities to survive, ergo the need for trading of goods and services. The trading of goods (and services) has become too impersonal; people do not *meet* anymore to engage in trading. Some people have become powerful by just engaging in trading, without producing anything. The poor people who depend on natural resources for livelihoods seems to have become powerless in dealing with what markets have become.

In this issue, we feature stories of people and communities in dealing with markets.

Por (uncle) Kammook from Thailand chose to produce most of what his family needs, thereby decreasing their dependence on the market, especially for their food needs. He is also able to produce a surplus, which he sells to augment his income and increased his savings.

The fishers of Hua Ban Yang community in Thailand formed a community savings group to lessen their dependence on "middlemen" who lend money at steep interest rates.

The women farmers in the Meru Betiri National Park in Indonesia formed family herbal gardens (tanaman obat keluarga) and produced herbal medicine for the market. They took advantage of the national park as an ideal site for growing herbal plants. The herbal gardens increased their incomes and they were even able to support the "conservation programme" in the national park.

The locally-made herbal medicines produced by the women farmers in the Meru Betiri national park are very competitive in the market. It is this edge that the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Program in the Philippines is trying to exploit in favour of the communities it works with. NTFP is tapping established designers to help indigenous communities improve the design of their traditional handicrafts.

Pak (Mr.) Kamto a farmer living near the forest in Indonesia improved his way of producing palm sugar through a training provided by an NGO. Through the training activity, he was also able to work together with the other farmers in his community making their production more efficient. The process of working together also enhanced the spirit of "gotong royong" (helping each other) and strengthened their "bargaining position" with the state logging company (Perhutani) with whom they are negotiating terms in relation to the management of the forest in their area.

These are just some of the creative ways in which people in local communities deal with the market. As we see it, the insights that these stories bring are the following: a) people have the inherent strength to make productive use of the natural resources that they have access to and the belief in this strength should be encouraged, b) producing most of a family's food needs lessens a community's dependence on a market that it has no power to control, c) working together to run a savings group or to process a forest product provides benefits to all members of the group and enhances the strength that each individual member possesses (synergy).

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Community Savings Scheme and Coastal Resources Management

By Pornpimon Rattanakul, Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF)



The Ban Hua Yang Savings Group

Ban Hua Yang is a Buddhist village with a population of 803 people and 173 households. (427 female and 374 male) The village has total land area of 800 rai¹, with 670 rai devoted to agriculture and 130 for housing. The local elder said that around 80 years ago, the village was surrounded by abundant forest. Rubber trees were dominant in the area, thus giving the village its name, Ban Hua Yang; Yang means rubber tree in Thai.

Before 1990, the villagers of Hua Yan were farmers, growing rice for household consumption. However due to poor soil condition, many gave up rice farming and turned to fisheries for their primary occupation.

The fishing techniques used by the Ban Hua Yang community are still primitive. Engine boats with length of 5-7 meters and width of not over 2 meters and smaller boats with length of 3 wah² and width of 1 meter are generally used for fishing. Moreover, many also use fishnets or collect shellfish along the coast. Those who do not have enough working capital enter fishery businesses as hired labor. The community used to use several types of fishing gear, for catching shrimps, squid, mackerel and others. Now, the community uses less types of gear than in the past, because of the decrease in the variety of fish. Today, certain fishing gears are no longer used in Ban Hua Yang, because the types of fish caught by these gears are no longer found in the area.

Today, Ban Hua Yang is faced with a critical marine resource crisis, mainly due to trawlers and nocturnal anchovy fishing. The trawlers damage the community fishing gears, forcing them to spend money to fix these or to buy new ones. Some even have to borrow money from the black market and pay high interest, up to 20 percent per month. Also, trawlers catch even small animals, like young shrimps. Nocturnal anchovy fishing has led to biomass fishing, resulting in the rapid decline of fish stock.

Aside from damage to the community fishing gears, the villagers' revenue has decreased from an average of 800 to 1000 baht per day to just 150 to 300 baht per day. Now, villagers are trying out new fishing gears and are risking going further out to sea. Because of this, they incur more expenses for the gears and oil for their boats. Sometimes, they need to borrow money from the black market, resulting in debt.

The main problem of the community is that they take out loans from a middleman, at high interest, so that they can invest in their fishing gears. This has created a situation of debt in the community. To address the problem, the community promoted the creation of a savings group, such that they could get loans from this group, instead of having to rely on a middleman. This allows the fisherfolk to save for themselves and for their family. Therefore, the saving group of Ban Hua Yan was established in 1993, with 40 members. The group received initial funding from the Provincial Administrative Organization, the Department of Fisherfolk and the Southern Cross-Border Facilitating Unit. Since they started, the savings group has saved and regulated 1,500,000 baht. At present, the savings group has 90 members.

How does the group work? Each shareholder receives a benefit output of 8 baht. The funding generated is used for the village fund. As a result of the savings group's activities, they have been able to establish a welfare group that provides money for various needs, such as health care, funerals and scholarships.

Because of the severe degradation of the marine resources, fishing as an occupation is not enough to support the livelihood and families of the fisherfolk. Therefore, the group has also encouraged members to invest in secondary occupations, such as chicken farming, fish farming and kitchen gardening. Members can have initial seed money to invest in both their primary and secondary occupations. The savings group has released the community from the cycle of debt created by informal lending, which usually has high interest rates. There are still challenges however. Some members take out loans and cannot pay them back. Some members also do not fully understand the objectives and concept behind the saving scheme. The result is that when there are incidents of cheating, other members tend to do the same.

Pornpimon Rattanakul is one of the NGO workers under the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) Network. He can be reached through SDF: preecha@mozart.inet.co.th

¹ One rai is equivalent to 0.16 hectares

² One wah is equivalent to 2 meters



Supporting Forest Conservation Through Herbal Gardens

By Nurhadi

Meru Betiri National Park has abundant medical plant resources. Research from the LATIN Faculty of Forestry, Bogor Agriculture Institute consortium in 1994 identified approximately 300 plant types. The abundance of herbal plants prompted the idea of developing a self-supporting health movement. This movement is implemented through formations of TOGA (Tanaman Obat Keluarga) groups. These are family herbal plantations. The TOGA groups would encourage institutions to regularly and correctly use traditional medicines. This would also lead to the conservation of the herbal plants found in Meru Betiri National Park.

Efforts began with establishing TOGA in supporting villages around the national park. This was begun in 1996, with the TOGA group named Sumber Waras in Andongrejo village. This group was composed of 25 housewives. In 1997, another group, the Sari Hutani group with 28 members, was established in Curahnongko village. Then in 2000, the Enggal Waras TOGA group with 30 members, was established in Sanenrejo village.

With intensive assistance during the training courses, apprenticeship, and comparative study, the housewives joining the TOGA groups have been able to produce various types of traditional herbal beverage from medical plants. Some products are in instant forms, such as instant wild ginger (temu lawak), instant aloe vera, instant ginger, instant turmeric, among others. Some are in the form of herbal powders, such as herbs for cancer, uric acid, diabetes, hypertension, asthma and others.

The TOGA groups and their products are widely accepted by the communities. This is evident in the wide use of TOGA products as alternative remedies to prevent and relieve some illnesses. The people who use the TOGA products do not only come from Jember area, but also other areas such as Lumajang, Banyuwangi, Probolinggo, Surabaya, Jakarta and others, although still on a limited scale. From all of the TOGA products that are used in the communities, ten of these are highly competitive in the market. These products are widely used by the communities because they are very effective in relieving illnesses. Among these are the remedies for uric acid, diabetes, hypertension, rheumatic disease, cholesterol, and tumors. Wild ginger, instant ginger and herbal teas are also popular items.

The favorable response of the communities toward TOGA products is a result of good management of the TOGA home industries. The TOGA groups focus on togetherness, sharing of responsibilities and shared decision-making and problem solving. Therefore, a TOGA home industry can be seen as common property system, the resources and benefits are not privately owned. With this system, a sharing model is developed to manage and distribute incomes proportionally and professionally. The TOGA home industry provides additional income of about Rp5,000 per day for every member. This system is developed as a commitment to empower and improve the welfare of marginalized communities.



A TOGA member and her products

In relation to the conservation of Meru Betiri National Park, the TOGA groups have supported the rehabilitation programme for critical lands by encouraging communities to grow the medicinal plants. In the future, there will be strong relationship between the TOGA groups and the rehabilitation programme, because TOGA will be one of the main buyers of the medicinal plants. The harvested plants will be bought in raw form, and then processed into herbal medicine, snacks, and healthy beverages.

Because the raw materials are readily available, production costs can be lowered, making TOGA products efficient to produce and affordable. The efficiency of production will continue to improve as the TOGA groups increase their competence and capacity. The good quality and the affordable price of the products will enable the products to compete in the market. It is hoped that the community, by being a part of the whole system, will also be able to develop and benefit from the production of herbal plants. Improving the production process of the medicinal plants will result in added value, and thus also increase the community's income. As the housewives learn to process the raw materials into finished TOGA products, they will get more income because the finished products have higher selling value than the raw materials.

Within this context, there will be mutually beneficial relationships built between the TOGA groups and the farmers' groups from the rehabilitation programme. The communities will be able to get sustainable livelihoods and the forests in the national park will be conserved and maintained. Integrating the two programmes results in double benefits. First, it will encourage the TOGA groups to build greater capacity in processing medicinal herbs. Second, the farmers' groups from the rehabilitation programme will also be encouraged to rehabilitate the forest areas by planting herbal plants which have high economic value and conservation value.

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Integrated agriculture reduces dependency on the market

By Oy Sirisook Weston, Sustainable Development Foundation



Sam Pak Nam is a small community of 91 households, located in the Phu Phar Marn National Park in Khon Khaen Province, Thailand. Sam Pak Nam is an example of an empowered community that has made a profound effort to participate in sustainable land and forest management. Their efforts are significant, since their community has been the site of some political struggle surrounding a number of forced evictions caused by government policies.

On returning to the area after the eviction, the community learned that their settlement area had been declared part of the National Park. This development has disrupted the community's livelihoods, and has created some social as well as environmental instability.

Currently, the people of Sam Pak Nam are trying to practice holistic natural resource management, and have developed some good practices in alternative agriculture resource management. This alternative system has freed the community from market dependent livelihoods, and can be illustrated by the case of Por (uncle) Somjit Eakwaree. He has a family of four and is living on 25¹ (4 hectares²) rai of farming land.

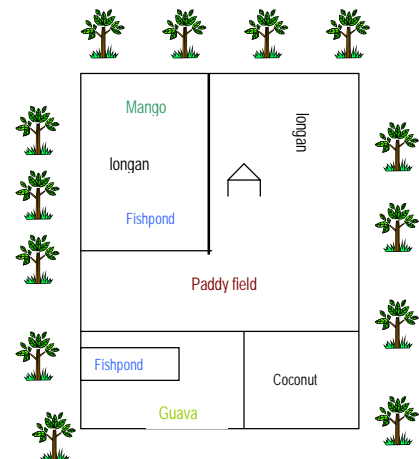
Por maximizes his family's small farming area to ensure food security for their household. He has managed to reduce expenditures on food, and has also increased his savings. He raises cattle, which are capital assets, as well as chicken and pigs that provide organic fertilizer (manure). Because of this, he doesn't have to spend much on chemical fertilizers. Products are harvested directly from the land and from fish ponds, which provide a critical source of protein. These products are used primarily for household consumption. Seasonal fruits, such as guava, mango, jackfruit, banana, lychee, mandarin oranges and longan, as well as kitchen vegetables are readily available without having to buy from the market. His paddy field produces 160 bags of rice, which feeds his family for the whole year.

If his family did not have sufficient household production, they would be spending at least 5000-6000 baht for rice. Por is even fortunate to be able to sell longan and mango in the market if the harvest is good. However due to recent overproduction, earning from longan has declined from 50,000 baht to 40,000 baht over the last three years.

However, other fruits, can bring up to 9000 baht per year. Cattle and pigs that are raised for farm labor, can also be bred for sale, and can earn up to 70,000 to 100,000 baht on a lucky year.

It is important to note that Por's 25 rai of farmland had not been cultivated for rice before, following the government policy of cash crop production. Such monoculture practices involved intensive use of chemicals. Por Kamook said that during that time, "I did not have time to rest and was exposed to high levels of chemicals. My health was at stake and we could only expect income and food availability once a year after harvesting. My income was declining." By shifting to sustainable agriculture, he now experiences year round food availability, especially food, fruit and fish, without expense and at the same time, earning income. With a production of a variety of fruits and plants, incomes are earned at different times of the year, making him less vulnerable as when he was relying on a one-time harvest.

While a majority of the community is aware of sustainable agricultural practices, some have not been able to transform their livelihood due to various reasons. First, there were the evictions. After being removed from their farming lands, they had to start again. On their second return to Sam Pak Nam, the government was promoting monoculture, particularly the production of corn and beans, with intensive use of chemical fertilizer to boost productivity. Aside from this, there are other agriculture developments that are influenced and dictated by the external market system, resulting in unreliable and fluctuating income that most often is not adequate to provide capital inputs back to the land. To be able to maintain high yield, farmers were compelled to invest in chemical fertilizers that harmed their health and the environment, and in the long run, did not necessarily guarantee high productivity.



A diagram of Por Kamook's 25 rai farm plot

¹ 1 hectare = 6.25 rai

² This is higher than the average landholding in Java, Indonesia and the Philippines. In Java, average landholding is less than 1 hectare and in the Philippines it is a bit over 1 hectare.

Oy Sirisook Weston is a programme officer with SDF. For further information, email preecha@mozart.inet.co.th



Training Announcements

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE – “TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY FISHERIES MANAGEMENT”

This training program consists of 2 modules. The first module, “**Fisheries management: perspectives, information and co-management**” will be held from October 4 to October 22, 2004. The second module, “**Tools for fisheries co-management**” will be held from October 25 to November 19, 2004. It is possible to apply for only one, or for both modules. This will be held in Wageningen, Netherlands

Organisers: International Agricultural Centre (IAC), in co-operation with Wageningen University.

Information and application forms to be obtained from: International Agricultural Centre (IAC) P.O. Box 88 6700 AB Wageningen, Netherlands
E-mail: training@iac.agro.nl
Fax: +31-317 495 395
Tel: +31-317 495 495
Home page: www.iac.wageningen-ur.nl

The International Institute for Rural Reconstruction is offering the following courses:

RURAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

May 3 to 21, 2004
Course fee: US\$2,500

This course is for senior and mid-level development managers, and covers development issues, managing sustainable and people-centered development programs, and managing development organizations. It addresses aspects of program and project planning, implementation and evaluation. Participants are introduced to real-life experiences in rural development. The course is built around observations of community-level development efforts in the Philippines.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ADVOCACY

This is a one-week training/workshop followed by 4-weeks online instruction. It is a collaborative course under the Global Partnership Program.

May 24 to 29, 2004, one-week face-to-face portion at IIRR (1 academic credit or unit); June to July, 2004, 4-week on-line instruction (1 academic credit or unit)
Course fee: US\$1,000 face-to-face portion; US\$550 for online instruction

Resources

MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: Uniting Science and Participation

Edited by Barry Pound, Sieglinde Snapp, Cynthia McDougall, and Ann Braun

This book presents innovative approaches for establishing and sustaining participation and collective decision-making, good practice for research, and challenges for future developments. It covers a wide range of natural resources - including forests and soils, and water and management units such as watersheds and common property areas and provides practical lessons from analysis and meta-analysis of cases from Asia, Africa and Latin America. It offers insights on how to make research participatory while maintaining rigour and high-quality biological science, different forms of participation, and ways to scale up and extend participatory approaches and successful initiatives.

For details please visit <<http://www.earthscan.co.uk/asp/bookdetails.asp?key=4008>>

To purchase a hard copy, please visit <http://www.earthscan.co.uk/asp/bookdetails.asp>.

TRADE LIBERALIZATION, AGRICULTURE AND SMALL FARM HOUSEHOLDS IN THE PHILIPPINES: Proactive responses to the threats and opportunities of globalization.

Published by PLWR, HPI, CRS, PhilGerFund, PhilDHRRRA, IIRR, ANGOC and AFRIM. 2004. 180p.

This publication attempts to examine the impacts of trade liberalization on local initiatives of small-scale, rural farm households in the Philippines. Twenty papers related to policy, sustainable agriculture initiatives, sustaining strategies, diversification of farms, land tenure, agricultural trade, commodity liberalization, vegetable production and marketing, access to market, and combating poverty were prepared. These case studies document the experiences at the household level where manifestations of trade liberalization have been felt. The organizers hope that the publication will increase awareness among stakeholders, and will develop a greater social responsibility and accountability among policy makers, development workers, and practitioners.

To order a copy please send an e-mail to information@iirr.org or Publications@iirr.org



The CBNRM Practitioners' Directory can now be accessed at
<http://www.esscspark.org/>



Developing Local Regulations in Meratus Area

By Betty Ro Minar, Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Adat (LPMA)

In the December 2003 issue, we reported on the SPARK study tour in the Philippines that brought local government and community representatives from Agusan del Sur to the municipality of Bakun in Benguet province. Bakun is the ancestral domain of the Kankanaey-Bago community, and has been awarded a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) under the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA). Aside from the Filipino participants, two Indonesian visitors from the Meratus Area took part in the study tour. This is an update on the progress of LPMA in preparing local regulations that recognize the rights of indigenous peoples' communities to their ancestral lands.

The SPARK Study Tour to Bakun, last November 23 to December 1, 2003, was an interesting eight-day journey, providing a good opportunity to visit the Kankanaey-Bago indigenous communities. The Kankanaey-Bago people have been managing their customary land, or ancestral domain, through the rights recognized by the 1997 Indigenous People's Rights Act of the Philippines. This experience has inspired Lembaga Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Adat (LPMA) to do the same thing by encouraging the formulation of a local regulation among three villages in the Meratus area.

To prepare for this, the Natural Resources policies Advocacy Division of LPMA-Borneo Selatan initiated a regional regulation study focusing on villages in Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency. The results of the study will be used as a starting point to formulate a local regulation (PERDES) in the villages of Juhu, Hinas Kiri, and Hinas Kanan, under the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency.

Simultaneously, work is being done with the village institutions, to build capacity in planning and in the formulation of local regulations that are within the constitutional framework and are responsive to community needs.

Capacity building is important because at present the village institutions are still weak in terms of formulating local regulations properly. Usually, the regional authority formulates local regulations, and often this process does not involve participation by the communities. There is now a new policy (Regulation No. 5/1979 to No. 22/1999) that recognizes the village as an autonomous institution and grants them the authority to manage their own administrative affairs. However, because this is still a new policy, the village representatives have not yet developed their full capacity, particularly in coming up with legislation. Hence there is still a need to improve their capacity.

Aside from the existing policy study, LPMA is also recording the customary law and covenant that are still practices the three villages.

The expected outcome of these activities is the formulation of good local regulations, mutually developed by both the village administrators and the Dayak Meratus communities

in the three villages. The regulations formulated should focus on the protection of the Meratus ecosystem particularly the customary land, from the threat of over-exploitation and unsustainable resource use.

Why have a local or village regulation? The village is the smallest autonomous unit in the regional structure. It is therefore authorized to have its own rural administration plan. Consequently, the community has the right to formulate regulations that would maintain the sustainability of the villager's livelihood and protect the territory as the community's – in this case the Dayak Meratus communities of South Kalimantan - life support system (forest, land, water). Another reason is that local regulations may encourage communities to participate in sustaining the environment.

There have been other positive developments in the area. Communication with Betty from LPMA has informed us that they have had opportunity to work with a government stakeholder from the Hulu Sungai Tengah Regency. The training will also now be opened to other villages within the Meratus area, and not just three.

For more information, please contact elpma@bjm.mega.net.id



LEARNING LESSONS

Have you:

a) learned from the articles featured in this newsletter (present and previous issues)?

b) applied what you have learned in your work?

If you have, please share your story with us, please contact:

Joel.Pangilinan@vsoint.org



The HIGHS and LOWs of Crafts Marketing

By Nola P. Andaya, Non-Timber Forest Products-Task Force (NTFP-TF)

At the Non-Timber Forest Products Task Force (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 at low volume. Taking into consideration factors that are not usually present in marketing mainstream crafts, such as 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. Due to the limited volume as well as other factors such as distance from the market, higher labor costs, etc. which results 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.

It's also a reality facing indigenous handicrafts that they have become commonplace due to indiscriminate application to modern, mass produced products. This has caused a decrease in crafts' perceived value, undermining the intricate and tedious process that the artisans do 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 and cultural value that goes into it.

FATE and FAME

It was at F.A.M.E. (Furnishings and Apparel Manufacturing Exchange), one of Manila's premier trade fairs¹, that the fate of this strategy was sealed.

Through the invitation and support Mangyan² Heritage Center, The NTFP-TF and partner, Mangyan Mission had the chance to present the Mangyan Crafts to an international audience and a sophisticated and modern lot of designers at last year's FAME, the largest international trade fair on Philippine furniture and crafts organized by CITEM. It was at this fair that we met designer, Tracie Anglo-Dizon. This young and pro-active designer shares our passion to elevate IP tradi-

tional crafts to the level it should be in – a level that will value the *hand* in handicrafts. Inspired by a brand called LOSA (London – South Africa)³ that she came across on one of her trips to the UK, Tracie, together with other three designers, readily teamed up with NTFP-TF to create a line that will be guided by the high value and low volume mantra and that shall promote the craftsmanship of IP crafts.

Hopping on the Brand Wagon

This line, which will open up new niches for IP crafts thus increasing the demand for it, will range from fashion to homeware and lifestyle. The line shall be a blend of craftsmanship perfected through countless 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 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...well, with a little revision, it can be a formula for IP crafts marketing — High-low, high-low, off to market we go... (whistling sound).

Nola P. Andaya is the Crafts Coordinator for NTFP-TF. For further information on their work please email nola.andaya@ntfp.org.

This is a slightly revised version of an article that appears in the April 2004 issue of the NTFP-TF newsletter, "Not by Timber Alone".

¹ FAME is organized by the Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions and by the Department of Trade and Industry.

² Mangyan is the collective term of the indigenous peoples in the island of Mindoro, Philippines.

³ 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.



Improving productive and bargaining capacity to get out of the debt trap

By Nana Moore, VSO-Indonesia

The Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengembangan Sumberdaya dan Lingkungan Hidup (LPPSLH) or the Institute for Environmental Reserarch and Resources Development works as a "service provider" (a SPARK term to refer to a group providing assistance, for example) for the Setan Balong farmers group. LPPSLH is an NGO founded in 1981 by a group of students and intellectuals who were concerned about the situation of poverty and injustice in society. Setan Balong farmers group has become a solid and strong organization all over Banyumas and Pekalongan in Central Java, Indonesia.

LPPSLH has a partnership in Banyumas, assisting farmers in the production of palm sugar. Setan Balong had a training workshop on the "Fabrication Processing of Palm Sugar for Forest Farmers" last July 2003. As a result of this training, farmers like Pak Kamto, were able to learn new and better techniques to improve their production of palm sugar.

Before the training, Pak Kamto used to produce palm sugar in molds that were five cm in height and 4 cm in diameter. Now, he uses a mold with 2.5 cm height and four cm diameter. Although the factory uses an aluminum mold, this would cost Pak Kamto extra expense, so he modified it by using a bamboo mold, but still following the recommended measurement. He also pays more attention to ensuring a clean process for making the sugar. For instance, the farmers used to dry firewood over the wok, but this usually caused wood to fall on their work, resulting in dirty palm sugar. Now, Pak Kamto and the other farmers also try to maintain a smooth shape for the palm sugar. These factors will help improve the market for the their products.

Aside from improving their techniques in making palm sugar,

the training also helped to strengthen the "gotong royong" spirit, or the spirit of working together, among the palm sugar farmers. The farmers group collects all the palm sap from the farmers and produces the palm sugar as a group. Thway, the farmers in the area save time, thus allowing them to do other things. Otherwise, the farmers would have to sit and cook the palm sugar on their own, taking about eight hours per day. Since they collect the palm sap and cook the palm sugar as a group, this also decreased the consumption of wood from the forest for cooking the palm sugar.

These changes in the capacity of farmers to produce palm sugar and the enhanced spirit of working as a group will hopefully help to improve their livelihood. There were 25 farmers from five villages that participated in the training, and as they went back to their own areas, they expressed a strong spirit to work together. Presently, the farmers still depend on a middleman who lent them money with the agreement that they could pay back the loan with palm sugar. Of course, the middleman determined the price of the palm sugar; the price decided was almost half of the regular market price. Debt creates more debt.

Hopefully, the skill, knowledge, experience and the spirit of working together will also improve the farmers bargaining position with the Perhutani (state forest company). At the moment, they are negotiating the percentage share that they will receive from participating in the community joint forest management program.

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