

Voices from the forest

NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS EXCHANGE PROGRAMME FOR SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Cambodia's Own: FOOD FROM THE FIELDS AND FORESTS

Contributed by Femy Pinto, NTFP-EP and Lang Senghorng, Sahakreas CEDAC

There is now a growing consumer base in Cambodia's capital, of organic rice, vegetables, meat and poultry, palm sugar and WILD HONEY that are produced and harvested by over 2000 smallholder farmers outside of Phnom Penh, including around 750 traditional honey collectors who are members of the newly established community based wild honey federation or CBHE. The CBHE's own branded wild honey product, Khmum Prey (bees from the forest) joins an expanding array of local, safe, quality food products retailed at nine (9) CEDAC shops in Phnom Penh and Kratie province, and which are also distributed to different dealers, mini-marts and supermarkets across Cambodia's city capital.

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NTFP ECO-CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP IN KOTAGIRI

by Mathew John, Keystone Foundation



Photo courtesy of Keystone Foundation

Keystone Foundation, in Kotagiri, played host to a workshop on sustainable collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from January 31 to February 1, 2011. Aside from the discussion on NTFP collection, the workshop was also intended to review the current state of certification for NTFPs. Twenty-three participants representing various research/academic/civil society organisations attended the workshop.

Eco-certification is a broad issue with many aspects. Sustainability of NTFP is an ongoing concern. Those who are involved in NTFP collection, whether for commercial or subsistence use, need to be able to assess and ensure both quality and sustainability of supply.

Many groups are also participating in the development of standards and certification for NTFP products. There are however many schools of thought when it comes to these issues. Resource persons shared their experiences, as well as the approaches of different organizations. During the workshop, resource persons shared about the development of the FairWild Standards

and the Indonesian national standards. Because of the different approaches, it was necessary for participants to come to a common understanding of certification parlance, and the different processes involved in branding, labelling and certification.

Because of the amount of work going on around the development of third party and participatory certification systems, this was also a major area of discussion. Particular focus was given to the formulation of criteria and indicators for the Indian Forest Certification Principles. The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) was also tackled, since it gaining wider acceptance as a credible alternative to the third party certification system.

The workshop participants came up with several recommendations and suggestions that will be raised with the Indian National Committee. Ultimately, the main objective of the certification is to empower the communities to manage and preserve forest health and ecology for improved livelihoods. The focus on the communities should not be lost. Therefore, customary rights of communities should be incorporated into the certification process. The traditional and qualitative features of a community's knowledge should be documented, and included as part of the basis for certification. Community based or participatory methods (such as PGS) to document, appraise, and guarantee the sustainability of wild produce should also be recognized. Access to Benefit Sharing (ABS) for

bio-cultural heritage and resources, including intellectual property rights (IPR) should also be upheld and protected.

While certification is recognized as an important step forward, the group also remarked that it should remain as an impartial voluntary mechanism. Local initiatives for improving and standardizing NTFP products should not be undermined, even as the government takes on the responsibility for certification.

In order to ensure that NTFP-based livelihoods remain sustainable, long-term monitoring needs to be undertaken. A credible conservation research institution will be able to evaluate whether long-term NTFP utilization is having negative impact on biodiversity. Forest and natural resource managers should also be regularly updated in terms of the certification process, and have regular capacity building activities in order to help ensure ecological and livelihood security.



A view from the keystone garden

by Rasdi Wangsa

From January 31 to February 1 2011, 23 persons coming from India and 1 person coming from Indonesia met in a small town—Kotagiri, India. That one non-Indian person was me, Rasdi Wangsa from Aliansi Organic Indonesia (AOI).

We were invited to discuss the collective movement towards ensuring NTFP sustainability and market access through NTFP-eco certification.

I was there because I was invited by NTFP-EP to explore NTFP eco-certification possibilities for Indonesia. There are many NTFP products in Indonesia from resins, to vines, to fibers, to nuts, but often time their prices are so low; there is no incentive to conserve them. There is an interest if certification, therefore, could help provide a premium price for NTFPs in Indonesia. AOI had already assisted the forest honey network in Indonesia on organic certification. That was a start, but we wanted to learn more.

In India, the main discussion was on how to obtain the vote of confidence of consumers in the participatory guarantee system (PGS) model that is currently being developed. The consumers' faith in the system is critical to helping NTFPs gain a wider audience and be better received by local, national or international markets.

Other than the plenary sessions and the workshops in the garden of Keystone's campus, the participants were also invited to see a little about NTFP development in another corner of town. Different NTFP products and other sustainably produced products adorned the "Green Shop" run by Keystone Foundation, such as tea, forest honey, cinnamon, cloves, cosmetics, textiles and earthen vessels.

Sneh, of the Keystone Foundation closed the meeting, by communicating to the participants her hope and expectation that the group could continue to work together as a civil society movement that is developing and strengthening each other's approaches. The basic message from the meeting was the need to layout the aspects of community control, traceability and fair pricing, in the process of developing the system of certification and market access for non-timber forest products.

I think in Indonesia we have a lot to learn and there is much scope for the development of NTFP eco-certification here. Some steps to take would be linking up with the market (for eg. rattan furniture companies) to see their interest in purchasing certified NTFPs, establishing standards for certain NTFP products and testing a guarantee or certification system for NTFPs in Indonesia. This is a new challenge for Indonesia that AOI is willing to undertake with NTFP-EP and its network partners.

