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# The State of Wild Foods in Indigenous Communities: Policy Review and the Cases of Kankana-ey and Higaunon in the Philippines

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<b>Citation</b>	Alim, J., Cumatang, B., Kollin, A., Reyes, G., Salomon, T., Toyongan, K. or Alim., J., Cumatang, B., Kollin, A. (2021). The State of Wild Foods in Indigenous Communities: Policy Review and the Cases of Kankana-ey and Higaunon in the Philippines. Quezon City, Philippines: Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme Asia (NTFP-EP Asia).
<b>ISBN #</b>	978-971-93388-6-4
<b>Available at:</b>	nftp.org
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<b>Cover Photo</b>	Sophie Nengel

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Non-Timber Forest Products  
Exchange Programme – Asia  
2021

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# Overview

## THE (WILD) FOOD SCENARIO IN THE ASIAN REGION AN OVERVIEW TO THE WILD FOODS, BIODIVERSITY AND LIVELIHOODS COUNTRY PAPERS

by Madhu Ramnath (NTFP-EP India; Wild Foods,  
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### INTRODUCTION

Across the indigenous and rural communities of Asia there exists a deep knowledge about uncultivated foods. In addition to this, the cultivation systems include many lesser-known crops, be they millets, various legumes, yams, and other tubers. Quite often, within these farms and fields, various freshwater snails, crab, and fish, as well as some edible plants too are harvested. Such uncultivated foods have supplemented the diets of the rural and indigenous communities for many generations; apart from the obvious nutritional values that they provide, many of these foods have cultural and sociological links to these societies, as we shall see from some of the case studies.

For the purposes of this paper, wild foods encompass all edible material that is found in the wild (both land and water) and includes leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds and stems, tubers and rhizomes, resins and gums, honey, fungi, as well as eggs, fish, and game.

Mainstream agriculture has, by emphasizing quantity over diversity and quality, delinked food production from nutrition and culture. It is almost as if food production has only one goal: the filling of stomachs! Identity and tradition, exchange, and reciprocation with food and foodways, have been left out. More importantly, wild foods and other traditional crops provide communities that grow (or collect) and consume them with several essential micronutrients necessary for health; in addition, the diversity of crops in a farm supports their food security when a certain crop fails, or if the monsoon is not as good as expected. National and international policies around food and food subsidies, and an official oversight about wild uncultivated foods in most rural diets, have led to a decline in the knowledge about wild foods in the region. In addition, the sole promotion of a skewed agricultural policy in Asian countries, has led to the expansion of monocultures, further reducing spaces where wild foods thrive.

In this series of country papers, it was found important to include all the foodways prevalent in the region. This includes rotational farming systems that focus

on several non-mainstream crops, as highlighted from case-studies from India; aquatic foods such as freshwater fish and crab from rice-fields; and forest foods, such as small game and insects, as from the various forest areas in the region. These case studies, and related fieldwork in Kalimantan and Sarawak, show the strength and the vibrancy of these food systems as they exist, and the various threats that they face while holding their own. The several forces that such food systems are up against—such as the loss of knowledge due to migration of the youth to urban centres, the intrusion of fast foods into remote indigenous areas, the expansion of palm oil and other monoculture plantations at the cost of forests, and other forces of modernity—are not easy to contend with. The modern diet is a massive trade-off: i.e., “the typical fast-food diet... now has only 40% of the wholeness of that of hunger-gatherers...”; ... changing from the hunter-gatherer diet to that of the agriculturalist was associated with a trade-off of quality for quantity, and with enormous changes in the incidence of specific diseases.” (Diamond, J., *The Third Chimpanzee*). One of the Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP)’s mandate is to revive the traditional and wild food systems among the communities it works with.

NTFP-EP’s work requires continuous updating of new food species and their status, the gaps in knowledge noticeable after workshops, and designing appropriate interventions to close them. Importantly, the link between wild foods and their nutritional and cultural values need to be also kept in mind. Other concerns, such as tenure security, climate change and biodiversity, and access to forests that have been declared Protected Areas, are equally important and will be a crucial part of the discussions as we progress in this field.

In 2020, the NTFP-EP Asia received grant support from the Swedish International Agricultural Initiative (SIANI) through its expert group program, enabling it to explore further the topic of wild foods and its links to tenure, biodiversity, livelihoods, and food security. Learning exchange and discussions were carried out through a series of focused dialogues participated in by actors from across sectors based in Sweden, Asia and beyond.

The following are some of the country highlights which will help us understand some of the overall similarities in trends, making it possible to draft appropriate interventions to some of the problems faced by indigenous and rural communities in accessing wild and traditional foods.

## **Cambodia**

Wild foods are collected from all landscapes in Cambodia and in the village documented for the case study (as well as in other forest villages), all the people harvest food from the wild. The knowledge about such foods is quite high, but there is a decline of available species due to deforestation (expansions of monocultures) as well as flooding and changes in river-flow due to hydropower dams. Rotational farming practices, though decreasing, are still being practiced, as in the case of the Kreung in Chuy Village. Many people who practice rotational farming often do so at the edge of their settlements where they gather insects, various greens (including flowers and flower-buds), mushrooms, fruit, and stems for consumption as well as for sale. In many parts of Cambodia, the indigenous people gather 'payab' leaves (*Gnetum* spp.), a local delicacy as well as an important item for sale into neighbouring Vietnam. Rattan is gathered and used as food as well as for handicraft, as it is in most parts of Southeast Asia.

## **Indonesia**

The ironic fact about the Indonesian food situation is the emphasis on rice and, more recently, wheat. Both these food crops were and are imported into the country in large quantities, despite there being other staple foods of the people. Sago has been predominantly harvested from the wild in the past (as in Kalimantan), and cultivated (as in Papua); there has been an array of forest and marine aquatic foods that have been a part of the people's traditional diets for centuries. These have included ferns, fish, a vast array of small game, wild boar, and sago, the latter two being a staple among the deep forest nomadic Punan.

Indonesia is one of the countries facing a huge challenge in terms of malnutrition which has become worse during the pandemic. Media reports confirm that thousands of families suffered from hunger in Jakarta, Depok, Bogor, Bandung, Medan, Muara Enim, Batam, Pekanbaru, Maluku, Bengkalis, and Polewali Mandar; the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) data shows that food export is also increasing every year. The export of fruits in 2019 was the highest in recent years (USD 1.5 billion), double the amount in 2015. However, in 2018, Indonesia imported 9.23 million tons of wheat, 4.6 million tons of sugar, 2.5 million tons of salt, and 2.4 million tons of soy. Meanwhile for rice, dependence on imports is very high, shooting up to one million tons annually at present from a figure of 990 tons in the period 1980–99. It is the primary cause of making Indonesia vulnerable to food security.

The displacement of traditional foods by rice and wheat has led to these being cultivated through subsidies even in places where they are not suitable, leading to clearing of new forest areas

and the extraction or pumping of groundwater, both detrimental to the larger ecology of the region. The country has also been made vulnerable as they depend largely on imports; this situation was accentuated during the pandemic period. An additional factor with the change in the food system is that the knowledge about traditional and wild foods is being lost; rice and noodles and various fast foods, all wrapped in layers of plastic, have invaded the indigenous territories.

## **India**

In India, cultivation and food collection occur in all landscapes and rotational farming systems, practiced by various indigenous groups in the central and the northeast parts of the country, provide a diversity of food crops. However, most government policies concerning food, with the aim of providing food security to the population, focus on the quantity of cereals distributed. In fact, the subsidised food provided by the state covers 75% of the rural, and 50% of the urban households. What is missing is that the Food Security Act has no mention of wild and uncultivated foods that supplement the diets of most rural peoples.

Much of the present-day situation regarding food systems, both mainstream and traditional, can be traced to the several decades of Green Revolution driven policies. Over these decades many mainstream foods and food patterns—rice- and wheat-based—displaced and overwhelmed traditional diets. The subsidized food distribution system as well as the compulsory education drive, which kept children away from homes and in school hostels, have been deciding factors in changing the way Indians as a people view food. Overall, one may say that diets have become more uniform across the country, also thanks to the intrusion and acceptance of fast foods. Unfortunately, many traditional foods and food systems have fallen by the wayside.

Many commercial crops, rice, sugarcane, wheat and, more recently, palm oil, have been encouraged. These ventures, many like palm oil supported by state subsidies, have drastically changed the landscape, even encroaching into the commons formerly utilized by marginalized or landless peoples to graze cattle, or to harvest various food plants. Simultaneously, Protected Areas (PAs) across the country have increased, denying indigenous peoples the access to harvest wild foods or non-timber forest produce that are used for their livelihoods. The latter move, of declaring PAs, has continued despite the assurance of tenure rights through the passing of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, a legislation meant to guarantee land rights to the indigenous and other forest dwellers in the country.

There is an overall decline in the knowledge and use of uncultivated foods in India. This is often due to the lack of access to spaces that were earlier accessible (now fenced off as protected areas, or privatized as plantations, etc.) or for various other reasons associated with modernity (migrating youth, fast foods, modern education that derides wild foods, etc.). These trends in changing diets are reflected in health. Female obesity in the country is 21% while male obesity is 19%; anemia among women and children is 50%, and 11.8% of the people suffer from diabetes.

### **Philippines**

Though field work was undertaken among the Kankana-ey of Sagada, Mountain Province and of the Higaunon in Malitbog, Bukidnon, the work also analyzed policies that impact the state of wild foods found in indigenous communities.

From the data gathered from the field as well as relevant literature it was clear that, as in other countries indigenous peoples have an inherent and intricate relationship with nature. Wild foods are used beyond subsistence alone; they are also used for their medicinal purposes and for their cultural and spiritual values. Knowing the importance of the 'wild' in their day-to-day lives, indigenous communities have developed resource management systems, practices and customary laws that have kept the forests pristine and intact.

Another key finding is that indigenous women and youth are crucial actors in sustaining wild foods and the overall traditional resource management systems. As community nurturers, indigenous women hold key roles in food and health systems. Meanwhile, the youth are expected to carry on the cultural practices which includes the sustainable use and management of wild foods. While migration for education and work significantly affects intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge, indigenous communities are exploring means to reintegrate the youth back to the community. One such example of this is the Higaunon's panlaoy, a traditional forest walk that enables youth to learn from elders about the biodiversity in their ancestral domains, including the wild foods and herbal plants found inside their conserved forests.

The review of legal frameworks relevant to wild foods and indigenous communities revealed that the policies meant to provide IPs protection are in place (e.g., Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (IPRA/Republic Act 8371), Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act (ENIPAS/Republic Act 11038) but do not materialize well on the ground. The FPIC process remains plagued by corruption, deforestation and plunder of natural resources remains unabated, and sustainable traditional resource rights remains curtailed and criminalized.

In addition, many indigenous communities face land use conversion due to business expansion and the encroachment of government projects that violate their right to self-determination. Communities also grapple with challenges such as tourism and the bad farming practices of non-indigenous peoples. Even with this seemingly bleak backdrop, however, indigenous communities maintain a positive outlook as they continue to assert their rights and secure their lands to maintain life in their territories.

### **Vietnam**

In Vietnam, 'wild foods' as a term has hardly found usage, even in official circles. The management of "wild foods" deals with the plants, animals, and fungi, and, at times, their relationship with their habitats and the ecosystem. However, all studies completely leave out the communities that use these foods and are closely connected to them. These communities are often the ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples who have been living in the forest areas for generations, and relying on these resources, especially for food. However, their community rights and benefits are not always included into the overall development and conservation plans of the state. Without an inclusive agenda that also cares for the indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs), their settlements will soon disappear or be replaced by the common modern forms of urban areas, causing the loss of their traditions and knowledge. This might prove to be a vital flaw in the process of sustainable development in the long term for the forest areas. NTFP Asia's work is therefore to find possible solutions by first trying to establish a comprehensive framework for inclusive wild food management that can not only cover all related aspects, but also care for all the involved parties, including the IPLCs.

Wild food has always been an important source of food for certain communities and populations, especially the vulnerable ones in forest, mountainous, or rural areas where agriculture is difficult or not allowed to develop. In times of economic difficulties, it can greatly contribute to the temporary alleviation of food scarcity. Products of wild food could also be a source of income for native and local people, mitigating the burden of poverty. Wild food plays an irreplaceable role in traditional spiritual or recreational occasions, events, or festivals of most native communities. This requires the local knowledge on how to find, gather, process, use, and preserve wild food, as well as how to organize these events. It is felt that only when wild foods are legally recognized that further actions to manage and develop it can be taken. Moreover, a legal framework on wild food, together with relevant policies, can practically help guide the implementation of effective wild food governance, especially with the inclusion of local communities and native people.

## ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

This publication presents perspectives and cases from the Philippines. It is part of the series of country papers produced by dialogue partners of the SIANI Expert Group Wild Foods, Biodiversity and Livelihoods Network. Other countries in the series include Cambodia, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

The present paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive review of the state of wild foods in the Philippines. Rather, it presents a snapshot of the situation of wild foods in the country, illustrated through case studies and review of available literature, and offers ideas on addressing challenges and seizing possible opportunities.

Apart from this paper, the group also produced a policy brief and discussion paper on sustaining wild food practice which highlights the key messages and insights from the dialogues and interventions of the WFBL network from 2020–2021. It is recommended that you pair the reading of this country paper with the policy and practice briefs to learn more about the wild food scenario in the Asian region.

It is hoped that the publications in the series contribute to available literature on the role of IPLCs and forests in ensuring a planet that is healthy, safe, and secure for all.

## ABOUT THE WILD FOODS, BIODIVERSITY AND LIVELIHOODS (WFBL) NETWORK, SIANI EXPERT GROUP AND NTFP-EP

### WFBL Network SIANI Expert Group

The Wild Foods, Biodiversity and Livelihood (WFBL) Network is an Expert Group supported by the Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiative (SIANI). The group is composed of individuals and organizations from multiple sectors, tied together by a common interest to consolidate knowledge about wild foods in Asia and its links to food security, poverty reduction and sustainable forest management. The network is convened by the NTFP-EP.

The group aims to consolidate traditional ecological knowledge about wild foods in Asia and bridge it with the relevant policy arenas to ensure wise, inclusive, and impactful decision making in the areas of food security, poverty reduction and sustainable forest management.

With support from SIANI, the group has facilitated and convened dialogues and knowledge-sharing activities at the regional level, engaging national and regional representatives from the forest and indigenous communities, government, science, civil society, and development agencies, creating an enabling environment for forest communities and indigenous peoples in Asia, going beyond conservation and expanding the understanding of the value of forests, especially wild foods, and traditional ecological knowledge and systems. Implementation of the activities ran from 2020–2021.

Learn more about the expert group by visiting [siani.se](http://siani.se) and [wildfoodsasia.com](http://wildfoodsasia.com).

### NTFP-EP

NTFP-EP stands as a diverse and collaborative network of over 100 NGOs and CBOs who all work with forest-based communities to strengthen their capacity in the sustainable management of natural resources in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

Starting out in 1998 as an informal group of practitioners working in local initiatives in Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Vietnam and the Philippines, the group recognized the potential benefits of sharing experiences and pooling expertise. In September 2003, NTFP-EP was registered as a non-profit organization based in Manila, Philippines.

At present, NTFP-EP serves as a platform for information and knowledge exchange of appropriate resource management and forest-based livelihood techniques and experiences. It is present in six (6) countries, particularly Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The network provides technical support and training, assistance in strategy formulation, documentation of best practices and success stories, mobilization of resources, advocacy for local initiatives, and lobbying efforts for enabling policies.

NTFP-EP work is focused on the following thematic outcomes: community-based conservation, indigenous food and health, tenure rights and governance, and sustainable community livelihoods, culture, youth engagement and empowerment, and gender equal community agency and voice.



# List of Abbreviations

AD	Ancestral Domain
ADSDPP	Ancestral Domain Sustainable and Protection Plan
CADT	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CALT	Certificate of Ancestral Land Title
CCP	Community Conservation Plan
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
ENIPAS	Expanded National Integrated Protected Area Systems Act
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
ICC	Indigenous Cultural Community
ICCA	Indigenous Peoples Community-Conserved Territories and Areas
IKSP	Indigenous Knowledge, Systems, and Practices
IP	Indigenous People
IPO	Indigenous Peoples' Organization
IPRA	Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act
KII	Key Informant Interview
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge

# Executive Summary



**Kilongan Ridge**  
Photo: Sofia Kollin

Recognizing that most of the Philippines' remaining forest and biodiversity are situated in the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples, this paper aimed to present the state of wild foods in indigenous communities. Specifically, this paper examined the cases of the Kankana-ey of Sagada, Mountain Province and of the Higaunon in Malitbog, Bukidnon. This paper also analyzed policies that impact the state of wild foods found in indigenous communities.

From the data gathered from key indigenous informants and relevant literature, it became clear that IPs have an inherent and intricate relationship with nature that can be observed on how they have use for wild foods beyond subsistence. They use these not only for provisional and medicinal purposes, but for cultural and spiritual uses as well. With the importance of the wild in their day-to-day lives, indigenous communities have developed resource management systems and practices as well as customary laws in place that kept the forests pristine and intact.

Another key finding is that indigenous women and youth are crucial actors in sustaining wild foods and the overall traditional resource management systems. As community nurturers, indigenous women hold key roles in food and health systems. Meanwhile, the youth are expected to carry on the cultural practices, which includes the sustainable use and management of wild foods. While migration for education and work

significantly affect intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge, indigenous communities are exploring means to reintegrate the youth back into the community, such as Higaunon's *panlaoy*.

The review of legal frameworks relevant to wild foods and indigenous communities revealed that the policies meant to provide IPs protection are in place, but do not materialize well on the ground. The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process remains plagued by corruption; deforestation and plunder of natural resources remains unabated; and sustainable traditional resource rights remain curtailed and criminalized.

Indigenous communities also deal with land use conversion due to expansion of businesses and encroachment of government projects, violating their right to self-determination. Aside from these, indigenous communities also must grapple with other challenges such as tourism influx and bad farming practices of non-IPs. Indigenous communities also expressed concerns over climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic as these exacerbate pre-existing harmful conditions and bring about new challenges.

Even with this seemingly bleak backdrop, indigenous communities maintain a positive outlook as they continue to assert their rights and securing their lands to maintain life in their territories.

# Introduction and Background

## RATIONALE/OBJECTIVES/MOTIVATION

Wild foods are essential for indigenous communities' subsistence and their overall food and health systems. Foods and other non-food products they gather from their forests are also connected to the way they conserve resources in their ancestral lands as they believe that their land is a gift from their god and a dwelling place of their ancestors and other supernatural beings.

Since time immemorial, indigenous communities have been coexisting with nature. Out of this dependence, they have developed indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices (IKSPs), which are manifestations of their indigenous science. Some of these IKSPs come in the form of knowledge on availability of resources in the wild based on meteorological patterns as well as traditional laws on resource management.

However, this intricate relationship between indigenous communities and nature—which affects the sustainability of forest resources including wild foods—faces several significant threats. These threats include internal ones, such as weakening traditional governance and limited youth interest and participation on cultural and other community affairs, and external threats such as tenurial issues and climate change.

## BACKGROUND/CONTEXT ON THE ISSUE

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issues being faced by indigenous communities. The pandemic has ravaged their economy, significantly affecting their traditional territories through encroachment by migrant families, the private sector, and government projects that intrude their ancestral lands in the guise of economic recovery.

Even prior to the pandemic, indigenous communities have faced development aggression and rights violations as outsiders attempt to exploit these pristine forests with booming biodiversity under their stewardship. According to reports from numerous indigenous communities, these have become more common, more violent, and remain marked with unapologetic impunity despite the pandemic.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PAPER

This research provides an overview of the situation of wild foods in indigenous territories by documenting the status of wild foods in select indigenous communities—how these are used, conserved, protected, and threatened—and by discussing key policies that impact wild foods and the larger resource governance in ancestral lands and domains. With these, this research can be used to inform policies and conservation interventions.

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## Scope and Limitations

This paper covered the cases of a Kankana-ey indigenous community in Sagada, Mountain Province and of a Higaunon indigenous community in Malitbog, Bukidnon through the eyes of their community leaders and the perceptions of selected ICCA women and youth from different landscapes in the country.

The paper's aim is not to generalize but to provide a snapshot of the conditions indigenous territories are in and how this affects the existence and survival of wild foods. During the data gathering, however, the team

realized that the two communities selected for the research are communities with relatively intact and strong cultures, with natural resource management still in place. There is the desire to provide cases of indigenous communities that deal with internal on top of external threats to provide the status of wild foods on communities at the other side of the spectrum. Most of the problems found in the two sites are mostly external so one can only imagine how much worse it is for communities that have to grapple with both internal and external challenges.

# Methodology



A map showing the research sites

Initial data collected through review of relevant literature informed the basis of the research and the overall research design. With these initial data, the team decided to enlist the participation of one representative indigenous community in the northern part of the country and another in the southern part. The team ultimately clinched the interest, consent, and commitment of two indigenous communities, which are the Kankana-ey community in Sagada, Mountain Province in the north and the Higaonon community in Malitbog and Impasugong, Bukidnon in the south.

To better inform the team's data gathering, they also reviewed other pertinent documents such as Community Conservation Plans (CCPs) of the indigenous communities. The team then scheduled and conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with key community representatives (e.g. leaders, cultural knowledge holders, and women). Aside from these, the team also analyzed relevant policies affecting wild foods and indigenous resource management systems as well.

## Literature Review

There are various attempts to document wild food species, although mostly plants, from Philippine forests even as early as 1921 (Razal, 2021). One of which is research that attempted to document wild crops, vegetables, and fruits eaten by the Pala'wan in Palawan Island. Together with the community members, they were able to document 23 sources of carbohydrates nine of which are wild, 63 wild vegetables, and 37 fruit trees, all of which are already part of indigenous community's subsistence (Celestino and Peralta, 2017). Meanwhile, an ethno-botanical survey conducted by Chua-Barcelo (2014) in Benguet, Philippines, found 36 fruit species that indigenous peoples and other locals use for food, forage, medicine, and ritual offerings, among others. These studies revealed that ancestral territories of indigenous peoples host a diversity of wild foods that

indigenous communities are already knowledgeable about, but the scientific community and the general public are not aware of.

In 2017, the Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP) Philippines conducted a workshop of wild foods with selected indigenous and local communities across the Philippines, which included the Agta of Quezon, Higaonon of Bukidnon, Tagbanua of Palawan, and Mangyan of Mindoro.<sup>1</sup> In the workshop, participants identified various wild foods such as fruits, nuts, vegetables, shoots, blossoms, mushrooms, tubers, fish, and meat, among others. During the workshop, indigenous participants pointed out that they have various uses for these wild foods and that they have traditional laws and practices connected to hunting and gathering these

<sup>1</sup> These are from NTFP-EP's unpublished documentation report entitled "Coming Home to the Forests for Food: Workshop on Wild Foods with Selected Indigenous and Local Communities in the Philippines."

from their forests. For instance, the Agta participants mentioned that they have designated sanctuary areas where no hunting is allowed. Meanwhile, the Mangyan participants pointed out that they observe rituals prior to hunting. Despite these, however, several indigenous participants expressed concerns over the decrease in quantity of their wild foods. One Mangyan participant even noted that they now need to go deeper into the forest to be able to hunt and gather wild foods. Aside from these, indigenous participants also identified forest conversion, illegal logging, poaching, forest fires, and climate change as issues that impact the wild foods in their communities. The results of the workshop provided more breadth to how indigenous communities sustainably use wild foods in accordance with their traditional policies and culture. Even with these, however, the top recommendation made from the workshop results echoed what studies on the matter have made before: that there is a need to conduct more research on wild foods, particularly its sustainable management, which is often the duty local and indigenous communities take on themselves.

Aside from use and management, Razal (2021) emphasized that there remains a deficit in research done on wild foods given the data gaps on the people dependent on it (i.e., indigenous peoples and forest dwellers), its inventory and distribution, nutritional composition, and its economic value among others. Another research gap on the subject matter is the review of relevant national policies since policy analyses have always been focused on agriculture, forest, and agroforestry.

Drawing from these literatures, this paper was developed in consideration of the role of indigenous communities as active stewards of the country's remaining forests and biodiversity, which includes the sustainable consumption of wild foods. This paper particularly aimed to present the case of the status of wild foods in two specific indigenous communities in the country, how they consume and sustain the wild foods in their territories, and to review policies that impact the state of wild foods found in indigenous communities.

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## Findings: Presentation of Data, Discussion, and Analysis

### BACKGROUND AND PERCEPTIONS

In Sagada, Mountain Province, the Kankana-ey believe that wild foods can grow anywhere in the community – in forests, mountains, and rice fields, including the walls of these rice fields, as they were told by their elders. Since childhood, they have become familiar with wild foods, like finding wild blackberries while hiking the mountains and forests, or gathering wild vegetables and frogs in the rice fields. They regard these wild foods as valuable sources of nutrition. Wild berries and vegetables are believed to be a source of strength, so they consume these when they need to go to work in the fields, either for irrigation or stonewalling work.

Aside from consumption, Kankana-ey communities also benefit from spiritual significance in selected wild foods such as wild chicken meat and “etag” (smoked meat) from wild pigs, which they use in rituals. In a ritual they call “Apoyan nan Danum,” they become one not only with their ancestors, but with environmental spirits as well— spirits whom they believe are helping them with what they plant and raise. During the ritual, they pray to the water spirit so that the waters will not abandon the places where they are currently found. They then use a white-feathered chicken for a ritual called “pukaw.” The sacrifice is specifically for the spirit



The Kankana-ey gather these alumani (wild blackberries) for consumption  
Photo: Sofia Kollin

of the water to partake, hence, shared to the waters. By regarding the environment as if it were living beings—which is how they consider the air and waters around them—a Kankana-ey informant mentioned that it facilitates community members' reverence to it and urges them not to disrespect it with any form of pollution or contamination.

The Higaunon community of Agtulawon Mintapod Higaunon Cumadon (AGMIHICU) is an IP community which, for the longest time, has conserved forested landscape within their ancestral territory. These lands are used as hunting grounds, the location of sacred sites, alongside many other uses that are deeply rooted in their cultural beliefs and practices. For them, the mountains and the forests are the elements that complete their well-being. It has been their sanctuary since the time of their ancestors. The food and other resources provided by the forest links them to their spirit, which fulfills their cultural identity. The forests provide the community what they need including their food, shelter, and medicines, among others. It is endowed with root crops, birds, honey, and diverse species of animals which they could utilize with the blessing of the good forest.

Wild foods form part of their cultural identity and a manifestation of their relationship with the environment. The wild fill their stomach with nutrients that the spirit of the forest blessed. Herbal medicines and plants cure the ill, and wild animals are their link to the spiritual realm.

However, in the present day, the community has adapted to the changes in the economic environment of society. Some of the community members are already working as laborers in some agricultural areas, including rice paddies owned by non-IPs and are earning daily wages. They have also learned to buy goods at local markets. Due to the changes in economic demand and the environment of trade and needs, the community has adapted to several other ways for subsistence. Collecting wild foods, hunting wild animals, and fishing has become a subsidiary means for livelihood. The rise in population and economic demand have made it unsustainable for community members to rely only on what naturally offered by the wild. Cultivated crops like maize, abaca, rice, and other root crops are filling the gap. However, cultivating crops for production are done only in designated areas.

With the hope to keep a balance between fulfilling economic demands and maintaining the supply of resources naturally produced by the wild, the community has initiated conservation practices to control the movement of people inside their community's conserved and protected area. Indigenous communities, in general, still consider wild foods as very important for its various uses. Awareness

and appreciation are high among elders, leaders, and women, but not so much among other community members such as the youth who usually move outside of the community for formal education and/or work. Migration is deemed a significant factor as it drives indigenous youth and adults to go to urban centers. With a significant amount of time that they spend away from their communities, it robs them of the opportunity to learn more about their culture and IKSPs, wild foods included. It must be noted, however, that the children and youth who stay in the community are often exposed to and involved in culture and traditional practices as they are usually involved in traditional livelihood and community activities.

## PRESENT SITUATION IN TERMS OF TENURE, MANAGEMENT, AND POLICY

### Biodiversity of Wild Food Species

Known as one of 18 mega-biodiverse countries of the world, the Philippines hosts almost half of the world's coral species, about one-fifth of the world's aquatic species, 5% of the world's flora, and a significant amount of endemic terrestrial wildlife and bird species (UNDP, 2016 and CBD, n.d.). Based on 2016 estimates, the country holds 15,000 plant species and 38,000 animal species, more than half of which is endemic (BMB, 2016 as cited in Ani & Castillo, 2020). The Philippines also has



at least 700 threatened species, making it one of the top global conservation areas.

Wild foods thrive in intact landscapes and seascapes, and it is no surprise that these are mostly found in indigenous communities who are stewards of the country's remaining pristine forests and clean seas. In fact, 75% of the 128 initially identified Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are found inside ancestral lands and territories (Quizon, et al, 2018). All these are attributed to IPs' intricate relationship with their ancestral lands, which they have developed since

time immemorial, guiding their daily communal life that revolves around sustainable use and management of natural resources.

As discussed earlier, indigenous communities have various uses for wild foods. For one, they benefit from wild crops and wild meat for subsistence such as root crops, wild frogs, and wild boars. They also benefit from wild herbs as traditional medicine, which they use in making decoctions to heal certain ailments. Aside from provisional and medicinal value, some wild foods such as honey and white-feathered chickens are also used as ceremonial objects.

With abundance, however, comes encroachment and development aggression by the government and commercial entities. As a result, their territories continue to shrink, limiting their hunting grounds as well as areas for cultivation of food. Even during the pandemic, indigenous communities have reported continued, if not intensified, operations of mining, property, and infrastructure development projects.

### Tenure and Management Systems

Hunting, fishing, and NTFP gathering remain important in daily subsistence of indigenous communities. These sources usually complement what indigenous households get from their *kaingin* (swidden farms), from what they can barter/exchange with neighbors, and from the food they buy from the local market. Essentially, food systems in most indigenous communities can be described as a mix of cultivated food and wild food systems but can vary from one community to another, depending on their remoteness and/or integration with the cash economy.

Indigenous communities have expressed their frustration over the vilification and criminalization of *pag-uuma* or *pagkakaingin*, commonly known as swidden agriculture or rotational agriculture system, despite this being an age-old IKSP-based practice of indigenous communities. They have repeatedly expressed how this policy issue impacts indigenous food and nutrition systems (more about this in the Policy Analysis subsection).

As mentioned earlier, abundance of wild foods is affected by various factors such as high incidence of illegal logging, wildlife poaching, excessive NTFP gathering, and development aggression as

manifested in commercial expansion (e.g. mining and large-scale agricultural investments) and government projects (e.g. building of roads/highways, reforestation projects) that bypass the FPIC process among others.

Amidst the pandemic, indigenous communities have had to depend on their IKSPs to remain healthy, food and nutrition secure, and resilient, which they find difficult considering climate change, development aggression, and limited social services. Indigenous communities have initiated conservation systems to holistically respond to the current threats in tenure, management, and conservation. These are mainly by (1) reinforcing traditional management and governance of protected areas<sup>2</sup>, (2) institutionalization of forest guards and strengthening traditional implementing bodies to oversee entry, utilization, and other activities within the ancestral domains and protected area.

### Policy Analysis

The lives of the indigenous peoples are interconnected with their land and the life within. The fundamental law which governs indigenous communities is Republic Act No. 8371, or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act<sup>3</sup> (IPRA). This embodies the declaration of the State to recognize, promote and protect Indigenous peoples' rights in management, control, development, and protection of their Ancestral Domain interconnected with their cultural identity. Other policies like the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)<sup>4</sup>, Wildlife Act (Republic Act No. 9147), and ENIPAS Act (Republic Act No. 11038) have been enacted to further the State policy of protecting the wildlife resources while equally recognizing traditional systems and processes in access and utilization. But often, these statutes, which are expected to be their cloak of protection, have become the very tool bringing disadvantage.

Rather than being a holistic process of giving consent and coming down to an agreement between the IP community and private or governmental sectors, FPIC has been implemented as a bureaucratic process based on fixed procedures (i.e., a "tick box" approach). Often, it has been used to bypass the real intent of the policy, encouraging companies and the government to find ways to bypass FPIC or "engineer consent" rather than integrate its principles into their activities in a holistic way (Campbell 2012)<sup>5</sup>. The "top-down

<sup>2</sup> For the Higaunon, it is to strengthen the policies in place and coordinate with state agencies for support in the protection of their Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw.

<sup>3</sup> RA 8371 was enacted in 1997, repealing Presidential Decree No. 410, Executive Order Nos. 122-B and 122-C, and all other inconsistent laws.

<sup>4</sup> Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a principal protected by international human rights standards and adapted by IPRA states that, 'all peoples have the right to self-determination' and - linked to the right to self-determination - 'all peoples have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'. Backing FPIC are the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Labour Organization Convention 169, which are the most powerful and comprehensive international instruments that recognize the plights of Indigenous Peoples and defend their rights.

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, J 2012, Engaging With Free, Prior, and Informed Consent Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), Copenhagen, [http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR\\_Engaging\\_With\\_FPIC.pdf](http://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Engaging_With_FPIC.pdf)

institutional design” of FPIC processes in the Philippines, which “prioritize efficiency”, are also said to risk disempowering local communities (Buxton 2012, p. 69) <sup>6</sup>. There are even reports of communities being required to undergo FPIC themselves to process their own Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title or even in the implementation of community-led projects. With this comes government projects and commercial interests entering without the community’s consent.

For indigenous peoples, large-scale mining and logging concessions spell displacement from their livelihood sources, aside from the loss of their ancestral domains. But over the past few decades, applications and agreements were unceasingly curtailing traditionally enforced resource management systems. Deforestation and environmental degradation have greatly caused them harm. Effects of these manifests on their inability to collect food from the wild for sustenance and added regulation in accessing readily available resources from the wild because of newly imposed statutory limitations. These issues also include the unceasing deforestation and the destruction of forests due to intrusion of business activities and even government projects such as construction of national highways passing through ancestral lands without undergoing the FPIC process. Aside from commercial interests and the government, migrants, poachers, and small-time loggers also continue to enter indigenous territories.

The degradation of forest wildlife and biodiversity caused by illegal wildlife trade is another major environmental issue in the country. Thus, the Wildlife Act was enacted in 2001 to provide for the conservation, preservation and protection of wildlife species and their habitats, in order to preserve and encourage ecological balance and biological diversity. It also imposes for the control and supervision of wildlife capture, hunting and trade. Section 7 of the Act recognizes the rights of the indigenous people in the collection of wildlife for traditional use and regulates its trade. But it is significant to note that this section only allows collection and utilization of wildlife specifically for traditional purposes only.

Another key policy concerning environmental resource access and utilization is the ENIPAS Act of 2018. Indigenous peoples communities have fought long and hard in the deliberation of institutionalizing their involvement in environmental protection and conservation nationwide, and this Act<sup>7</sup> became the hallmark as it specifically provides that traditional governance over ancestral domains that share areas

with protected areas shall be respected by virtue of native title. Priority rights to natural resource use, management, and conservation shall be accorded ICCs/IPs. Ultimately, the ICCs and IPs concerned shall have the responsibility to govern, maintain, develop, protect, and conserve such areas, in accordance with their indigenous knowledge systems and practices and customary law, with full and effective assistance from the NCIP, DENR and other concerned government agencies. The issue arises in the Implementing Rules and Regulation of the ENIPAS. It stipulates that traditional governance shall be recognized when there is a CADT/CALT<sup>8</sup> – a major flaw degrading rights accorded to ICCs/IPs holding claim over their ancestral domain only by virtue of native title. This specific regulation goes against the IPRA as the CADT/CALT is only a state tool for recognition. Its absence does not equate to the absence of the rights to self-determination over their ancestral domain.

This then became the root of several reports of criminalization and interference of indigenous peoples’ lifeways. These restrained indigenous communities from utilization and even entry into their own lands. For example, a Manobo community in Mt. Apo was left with no choice but to find other means to procure resources like wood and herbal medicines from the market when it should be accessible just by walking in the forest within their domain. Some Manobo leaders currently have warrants for their arrest because of alleged illegal kaingin and violation of DENR rules. They explained that the illegal kaingin alleged by the DENR is in accordance with their traditional practice of swidden farming. This is controlled and regulated and practiced only in agricultural areas based on the traditional policies of the community. Another leader said that as he was tending his fruit trees in his traditionally assigned farm lots, officers from the DENR reprimanded him, which later forced him to secure an affidavit stating that he was in violation of environmental laws and for trespassing the Protected Area. In 2017, the indigenous community where the majestic Tinuy-an Falls of Bislig City, Surigao del Sur is situated, rescued a Philippine Eagle. Instead of commending, some sectors alleged the incident as illegal hunting of wildlife. This goes in conflict with several provisions of the law which aims to recognize the dwelling and governance of ICCs.

State management of Protected Areas need not conflict with traditional conservation and utilization systems already enforced within ancestral lands. Even without state-imposed regulations, conservation and traditionally sustainable use of their lands, waters,

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<sup>6</sup> Buxton, A 2012, *The Spirit of FPIC: Lessons from Canada and the Philippines*, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G03398.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> RA 11038. Section 13. Ancestral Domains and Customary Rights. - ancestral domains and customary rights shall be accorded due recognition.

<sup>8</sup> Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title refers to a title formally recognizing the rights of possession and ownership of ICCs/IPs over their ancestral domains identified and delineated in accordance with this law; Certificate of Ancestral Lands Title refers to a title formally recognizing the rights of ICCs/IPs over their ancestral lands. Ancestral lands are occupied, possessed and utilized by individuals, families and clans who are members of the ICCs/IPs. While Ancestral domains are lands, inland waters, coastal areas, and natural resources therein, held under a claim of ownership, occupied or possessed by ICCs/IPs as a group.



territories, and the natural and cultural resources that they contain is the indigenous peoples' interest. Rather, formal protected areas can provide a means to recognize and guarantee the efforts of many communities who have long protected certain areas, such as sacred groves and mountains.

Limited support is offered to ICCs for the documentation and dissemination of their land use practices and policies, making it difficult for their traditional leaders to enforce these. Some families who through time have not actively participated in the traditional political life and decision-making processes of the community forget to live by customary law. This also affects the strength of enforcement of customary law in relation to non-IP, providing an enabling environment for encroachment into traditional territories. In addition, support and recognition of indigenous peoples' sustainable traditional resource rights shall be observed by both national and local level agencies.

Because of the conflicting and unmindful provisions of the ENIPAS Act, the Higaunon community has been unreasonably regulated in utilizing resources like collection of wild honeybees, wild boar, and other wild foods to sustain their everyday life. It must be noted that most wildlife protected areas are inside ancestral domains. This is a manifestation that traditional practices enforced by these ICCs have created and continuously forge sanctuaries for natural resources and wildlife to perpetuate.

### **Other Challenges**

With the lack of proper knowledge and sensitivity to the natural and cultural practices of ICCs, there is a perception by certain government agencies that untended ADs are "idle." This is the background of the government's facilitation of investments into ADs that perpetuates unfair trade contracts and unequal trade relations.

One of the challenges indigenous communities faces in the market is the unequal bargaining power in trade between small-scale producers and tradespersons. Tradespersons usually buy products of producers at immensely cheap prices and sell it to consumers mostly in urban areas and commercial establishments at higher price. In the absence of alternative buyers, most indigenous producers are forced to sell their goods at very low prices, endangering the sustainability of their livelihood. As a result, some indigenous producers are tempted if not forced, to sell their assets such as land and natural resources, which form part of their inalienable ancestral domains. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has limited their access to markets, resulting in a massive decline in demand for their products and severely affecting

their livelihoods. The decreased prices of purchases by farmers and the increased prices of products for consumers has made the poor indigenous peoples vulnerable to desperate actions in response to economic hardships.

To address the issue of unequal trade relations, some indigenous peoples and their communities have engaged in rural-urban linkage initiatives that enabled indigenous farms to supply food-impoverished urban centers. Some have been building up their community-based enterprises to bring food to urban markets, while some have forged new connections to overcome new challenges brought by COVID-19. These continue to bolster the incomes of indigenous peoples and their communities while providing nutritious food to urban centers who need to fend off disease as they confront the exponential rates of transmission of COVID-19. These farm-to-table innovations have also built awareness on the role that indigenous peoples play in food security and their ability to sustain their food-based enterprises, while ensuring the health of their biodiverse landscapes.

Aside from economic inequalities, indigenous communities also deal with bad farming practices. The government's bias for mass agricultural production has forced conventional farming on several ancestral domains. This affects biodiversity immensely because conventional farming utilizes chemical fertilizers and insecticides which affect the air, water, and soil quality within ancestral domains that often are adjacent to key biodiversity areas--the source of wild foods. Several instances of poisoning of keystone species, such as honeybees and other insects, have been reported for forests adjacent to farms that utilize conventional farming practices.

Climate change has also been identified as a critical factor. As quarantine measures have been protracted, ICCs/IPs expressed concerns on diminishing food supply related to the prevailing climatic conditions, among others. Among the reasons for this is the fact that the pandemic crisis coincided with the dry season in the Philippines, which does not only mean less rainwater as irrigation but also more likelihood of forest fires. These affect the availability of food at such a critical period where movement is limited, curtailing their ability to buy and sell food. Climate change has also been observed to affect the productivity of indigenous farming and has rendered some of their traditional hunting and gathering practices out of harmony with nature. Some indigenous communities have found difficulty recovering from the frequency and greater intensity of natural disasters that ravaged during the rainy season in 2019.

As mentioned earlier, the pandemic crisis is also a threat to indigenous communities. There are reports

from partner communities that health protocols are being used to suppress traditional governance mechanisms, such as meeting and even engaging the government given IPs' limited access to the internet.

## PRACTICE/CASE STUDIES

### Access and Use

For the Kankana-eyes, everyone in the community can collect and manage wild foods. Their traditional belief of *bulbulya* prescribes that a person's discovery of certain wild foods in the communal area provides him/her the right to benefit from it, even beyond his lifetime. Rooted in the belief that certain wild resources show itself to a specific person, it is believed that wild resources can suddenly disappear should another person try to benefit from it. Therefore, the person is also bound to the responsibility of tending and managing the area. The same principle applies to wild roosters that go into family gardens.

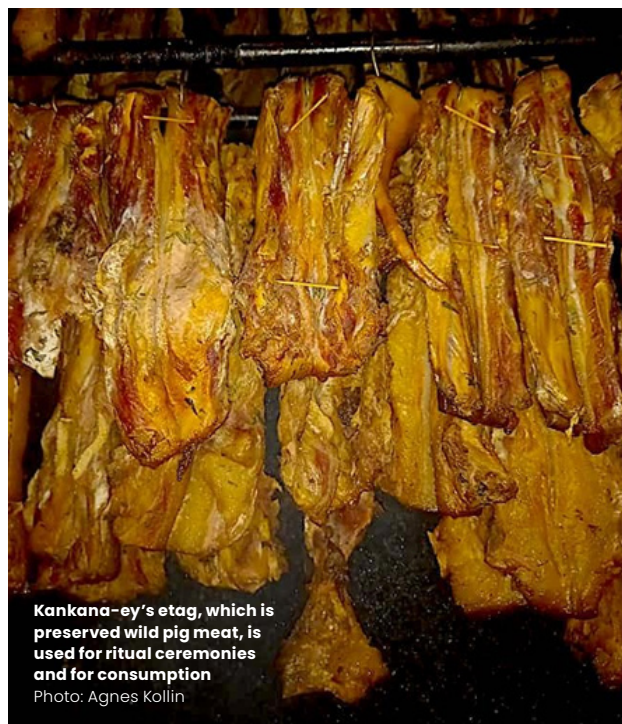
In terms of hunting, Kankana-ey set-up *beka* traditional pits used to trap wild pigs. Captured wild pigs then belong to whoever set up the trap. Ownership of *beka* can transcend to his next of kin, which means it is a property that can be passed from generation to generation or in case the original owner leaves the community.

Aside from hunting, gathering bird meat from both local and migratory birds is also a traditional practice in their community. Bird meat is then usually preserved with salt. There is the belief that women were the first ones to practice bird catching, which was why women took on the practice for so long. Due to an unfortunate incident where a woman was slain by a headhunter, however, the practice then became exclusive to men. With the imposition of a national policy over bird catching, the practice has declined over the years.

As discussed earlier, wild foods are typically used for consumption and for ritual ceremonies. The Kankana-ey use wild pig meat (*etag*) in their rituals while Higaunon use honey.

Aside from consumption and ritual purposes, wild foods are also used for livelihood. Wild berries from different villages are gathered by community members and sold to Sagada local, indigenous entrepreneurs who process these into local wines.

Meanwhile, the forests of Mt. Kimangkil play a significant role in the lives of the Higaunon. Wild foods fill their stomach, the forest gives them shelter, herbal plants and honey cure the ill, and other NTFPs are used for handicrafts and expression of cultural values. Hunting is still widely practiced with regulation based



on the traditional policies. Specific wild foods are also important elements in rituals

Traditional skills including *pangasu* (hunting), *panlais* (traps using bamboo slats), *panlit-ag* (traps using ropes), *pamuhag* (honey gathering) *panikop*, *pamataw*, *pamanglo* (fish hunting), etc still remain the first few skills men and women of the community acquire. Men, women, youth, and the elders utilize forest resources. It is to be noted however, that access and utilization in both conservation areas (*Patagonan* and *Bahaw-bahaw*) are governed by traditional policies in resource utilization. Some customary practices in access and utilization are the restriction of women in the collection and preparation of abated or the palm weevil grub. Hunting of wild animals like boar, deer and monkey are also strictly regulated if not prohibited. The forest and all that comes with it is an integral part in the life of the Higaunon, Apo Entampil would frown upon her predecessors if they caused the death of the forest.

### On Indigenous Women and Youth

It must be noted that indigenous women hold and fulfill crucial roles in ensuring the health of their families, food and nutrition security, and the general well-being of their communities. Indigenous women have served as the holders of knowledge of herbal medicine and practitioners of traditional healing. They also tend to food crops, transform these into nutritious meals for their household, and store food to ensure reliable food supply in dry seasons and times of crisis. They also collect non-timber forest products as additional food and as medicine among

other uses. Indigenous women also take on the task of disseminating information on resilience IKSPs to their respective families as well as passing these IKSPs to the youth, particularly to their daughters, as they grow up. Given such roles, they are often the repositories of IKSPs on health, food, nutrition, and resilience in times of disasters and diseases. Fulfilling these roles (e.g., homemakers, food stewards, nurturers, and healers of their communities), however, has become more difficult as indigenous communities face multitudes of issues that threaten their lives and lands.

Indigenous children and youth often accompany and assist their parents on various chores and tasks, learning IKSPs from an early age. They typically learn about wild and cultivated foods as they grow up. There are certain ages when they are allowed to provide support in the fields and to go with their parents in the forests, during which they are taught indigenous agricultural practices as well as hunting and gathering skills. As pointed out by indigenous informants, however, youth usually migrate for formal education and later for work due to the lack of educational institutions in indigenous communities. The time they spend away from their home robs them of the opportunity to learn more about IKSPs such as wild foods among others.

### Management Systems

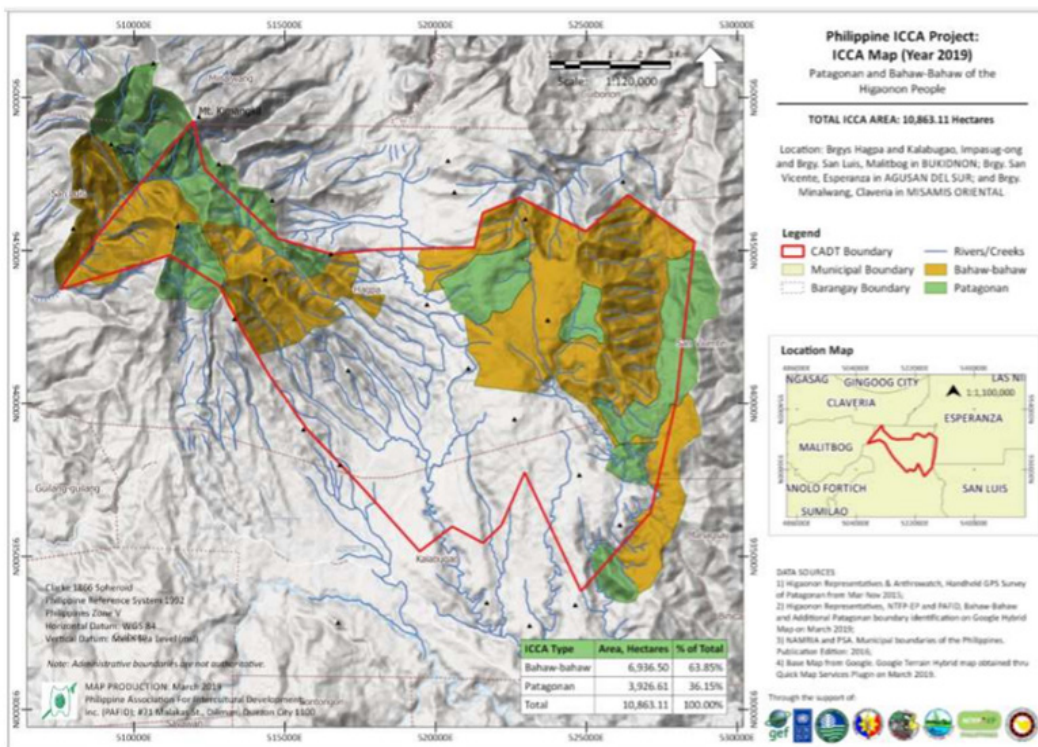
Customarily, the *pagpag* or conservation forests are designated hunting grounds and/or protected as these also host watersheds. To complement this, the Kankana-ey have developed their Batangan system on their production forests in agroforestry and forestry areas in their territories. The Batangan system refers to the self-reliant and sustainable management of pine forests. Recognizing their dependence on wood for various purposes such as firewood for cooking and warmth and construction, *umili* (villagers) have been planting pine trees on open lands, eventually becoming pine forests that are a source of wood, water, and food. Under the Batangan system, there are three types of batangan where ownership, use, protection, and management are defined. The *Kumon/Saguday di Umili* refers to communally-owned and communally-maintained forestlands where use of resources should be for something that benefits the whole *ili* (village). Meanwhile, the *Kumon/Saguday di Dumap-ay* refers to forestlands owned, managed, and used by members of a *dap-ay*, which is a socio-cultural and political institution and also a structure

composed of clusters of households surrounding the structure. Finally, the *Kumon/Saguday di Pangapo* refers to forestlands owned, managed, and used by a clan over a woodlot, pasture area, and/or land cultivations that are passed on from generation to another. Other management systems and practices such as those that they implement for their *payew* (ricefields), *uma* (swidden farms), *pastolan* (pasturelands), and *ginawang* (river systems) complement the conservation of *pagpag* and the Batangan system. With these IKSPs, Kankana-ey have been able to sustainably use and manage their forests, wild foods included.

Meanwhile, the Higaunon of Malitbog have classified their ICCA into two kinds of protected area to maintain the supply of wild foods and other NTFP. The first is what they call the *Patagonan*, and the other is the *Bahaw-bahaw*<sup>9</sup>. The *Patagonan* serves as a pool of wildlife where hunting and gathering, and collection of wild foods, are strictly forbidden. This is where the sacred and worship areas are and consist of their spirit forests. These areas are enjoined with strict customary policies. The *Patagonan* functions as a core zone or strict protection zone as compared to the system in place for the government Protected Areas. The other type of protected area is the *Bahaw-bahaw*. This is where the community is allowed to hunt and/or gather forest resources wherein harvesting and resource use is governed by the community's traditional and customary policies. *Bahaw-bahaw* primarily consists of the community's hunting ground. And is managed and protected by assigned families. It is where they hunt important wildlife for subsistence, and gather or harvest non timber forest products for food, medicine, livelihood, and spiritual purposes. *Bahaw-bahaw* functions as a buffer zone to *Patagonan*. Provided that they secure the permission of the *Insaan* or the council of elders, they may go hunting, plant traps using bamboo slats or rope to capture wild boar, deer, gather honey, fish using bare hands, hunt forest frogs, harvest rattan vines, and gather herbal plants.

The relationship of the youth and the elders play a vital role in the perpetuation of traditional management systems in the protection and conservation of the environment and its resources. The younger generations provide support to the adults in hunting and other forest-related activities. Elders instill the importance of environmental conservation to the youth at a young age as they are the next generation to stand and protect their *Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw* and maintain it if not make it richer.

<sup>9</sup> Patagonan encompasses a land area of 3,926.61 hectares while Bahaw-bahaw covers 6,936.50 hectares. In total, the ICCA of the Higaunon community of AGMIHICU spans an area of 10,863.11 hectares.



Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw, Indigenous Communities Conserved Areas of the Higaonon People of AGMIHICU.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Kankana-ey noticed the decline in wild plant population that coincided with the influx of tourists in the area because of intensified tourism. Based on reports, wild mulberries at Mt. Ampacao are said to be no longer robust as they were years ago, and their wild blackberries have also become smaller in size. "Nasuyak," or detrimental, is how the Kankana-ey describe the intensified presence of outsiders. They believe their wild resources have been poisoned/polluted as these become dry and start to wither. "Some tourists are like suyaks' to our community. We are partly to blame for allowing this to happen," an informant quoted. Cognizant of these, the traditional institution of self-rule like the Dap-ay, local government units, and other relevant stakeholders are in constant dialogue and agree on the need for certain restrictions like prohibiting hiking – tourists and locals alike – in mountains, caves and rice terraces when obaya is declared by the Dap-ay.

The decreasing number of wildlife observed through the years may be correlated to sudden human population increase in the area. There are more people to feed and support, thus, utilization of community owned forest resources increases, affecting its supply. The rise of migrants and intrusive private and government-led projects greatly threatened the tenure and lifeways of the IPs. Migrant occupation, according to Datu Benny Cumatang of the Higaonon, equates to less control and supervision by the council

of elders, that would then result in violation of policies which directly affects the resources found in the domain and conservation areas. Further, he expressed that the focus of the younger generation has not been on traditional knowledge and practices.

Community elders and leaders have established a way to resolve the disconnect. They conduct an annual traditional forest walk or Panlaoy, a cultural regeneration activity where the youth and other community members learn from the elders. During the forest walks, particularly along the borders of their territories, members of the community monitor the condition of their areas especially their Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw. It is also the venue for community leaders to reflect on the condition of their forests and transfer Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEKs) to the younger members of the community. These TEKs include knowledge about different kinds of wild foods, as well as the rules and taboos in collecting, preparing, and consuming said resources. Members may join every year to assess the changes in the forest and to engage in discussions. This is a significant activity in fulfillment of the community's aspiration to nurture the future generation of cultural knowledge that is slowly forgotten. It is essential to inculcate in the younger generation knowledge that would help resolve issues in cultural identity, as well as sustainability, resource management, and utilization.

Regarding migration and external factors affecting conservation and management of local resources,

Datu Cumatang emphasized that being directly aggressive would not be tenable. Cultural discussions can help non-IP occupants better understand their role in the protection and conservation of biodiversity.

“Cooperation is the future in cultural preservation. It cannot be done by just one person. This action is a collaborative act of the elders, today’s generation, and the youth. This is the life of the Indigenous People: We help each other, fill our stomach with what is around, and live with the spirit of the forest,” Datu Benny said.



Ritual for Declaration and Wild Foods Festival, above: HAMOG Youth performing dance and fire making using IP materials  
Photo: NTFP-EP Philippines

# Conclusion

## ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Through the data gathered from key indigenous informants and relevant literature, it was established that IPs maintain an intricate relationship with nature as their lives revolve around/ depend on it. The intricacy of this relationship is seen in how IPs use wild foods beyond subsistence, meaning it goes beyond the provisional and medicinal value of wild foods. In fact, wild foods are also part of their cultural and spiritual identities as these are also used in cultural and spiritual activities as ritual and ceremonial objects.

Another key finding is that indigenous women and youth are crucial actors in sustaining wild foods and the overall traditional resource management systems. As discussed, women carry out key roles in indigenous food and health systems. They serve as community nurturers and healers to name a few of these roles (e.g. farming, gathering of NTFP, bird catching, fishing, food preparation). As for the youth, they are the ones to carry on the torch. Migration for education and work significantly affect intergenerational transmission of indigenous knowledge.

Aside from these, it was found out that it is no accident that most of the country's remaining forests and biodiversity are in indigenous communities. As seen in the cases of the Kankana-ey up North and the Higaunon down South, it is thanks to indigenous resource management systems and practices as well as customary laws in place that kept the forests pristine and intact. These traditional systems and practices make them the hosts of no less than 75% of the Key Biodiversity Areas in the country.

Review of relevant legal frameworks, on the other hand, revealed that policies that are supposed to provide IPs protection are in place (i.e. IPRA, FPIC, and ENIPAS to cite a few) but these do not materialize well on the ground as these are not implemented well. There are numerous cases of corruption of the FPIC process, continued deforestation and destruction of forests and plunder of natural resources, criminalization of sustainable traditional resource rights (STRR) such as prohibition of exercise of traditional farming practices and denial of access and benefit-sharing.

On top of these challenges in legal frameworks, indigenous communities also face multitudes of external challenges such as bad farming practices and tourism influx which affect ecosystem health. There is also land use conversion done due to business expansion and encroachment of government projects that violate IPs' right to self-determination. Climate change and the pandemic are also regarded as threats as these exacerbate pre-existing harmful conditions and bring about new challenges.

Despite these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the general outlook shared among indigenous communities is that they will remain steadfast in their pursuit of asserting their rights and securing their lands to maintain life in their territories.

## CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Changes in the natural and socio-economic landscape have affected certain adjustments in the traditional policies imposed. However, how the Indigenous People perceive the role of wild foods stays the same – it is a fabric of their being as its importance goes beyond subsistence and touches even the spiritual aspect of their lives.

If in conservation there are keystone species that hold ecosystems together; for Indigenous Peoples, all species in the wild are keystone when it comes to their culture. Put simply, a loss of a species or a resource means loss of all the culture embedded in it. When this happens, they indeed lose a part of their indigenous culture, their identity.

Datu Cumatang succinctly summarized how IPs view the environment and natural resources found therein when he quoted "The man and the environment share a special connection that should not be broken. Nature is an extension of a man's spirit. We go to the forest to eat, nature feeds the man to life. And life in accordance with one's culture fills the spirit. The life of the forest completes a man."

# Recommendations

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the cases and policies relevant to the state of wild foods in indigenous communities, the following recommendations are made:

1. Ensure intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge from elders to the youth.
  - With several partner indigenous communities expressing their desire to have their IKSPs documented in audiovisual and written format (wild foods and indigenous cuisine included), it is highly recommended to have an in-depth exploration and documentation of these matters, which can facilitate intergenerational cultural knowledge transmission as well.
  - Assist communities in exploring intergenerational dialogue to facilitate cultural knowledge exchange in the manner of oral tradition where cultural masters and elders are more comfortable.
2. Fast track the recognition of tenure over ancestral domains, which include funding of self-delineation process and action on overlapping claims.
3. Provide capacity development for ICCs/IPs on assertion of rights in governance. This can include networking between communities to develop common strategies.
4. Broaden recognition of traditional governance especially in terms of conservation and natural resource management through policy advocacy and public education.
5. Conduct public education on ecological responsibilities and the role of IPs in conservation.
6. Ensure integrity of the FPIC process especially as it is related to natural resource governance. Enforcement of traditional FPIC and government to harmonize policy on FPIC in terms of land use and intellectual property.
7. Pass the green bills: Indigenous Communities Conserved Territories & Areas (ICCA) Bill, Sustainable Forest Management Act, National Land Use Act, and the Alternative Minerals Management Bill.

# Case Studies

## CASE STUDY 1: THE STATE OF WILD FOOD IN KANKANA-EY COMMUNITIES IN SAGADA, MOUNTAIN PROVINCE

### Perception and Familiarity

In Sagada, Kankana-eyes believe that wild foods can grow anywhere in the community – it can be found in their forests, in their mountains, and even in rice fields, including the walls of these rice fields as they were told by their elders.

Since childhood, they have become familiar with several wild foods they can find while hiking their mountains. Some of these wild foods are berries, mulberries, “pong-pong” (a chewable sour edible leaf), “akbab” (fruit with hard skin that tastes like fresh coffee bean), and “gulibangbang,” a fruit that resembles grapes. Wild plants found in the rice fields include wild vegetables such as “amti” that are usually found in the edges of rice paddies. There are also “saksakkong,” green weeds that grow in between rice plants that they must remove as it destroys the crops. Wild shells and mud fishes can also be found in the rice fields. At nighttime, they can gather wild edible frogs in the fields that they prepare as a meal.

In terms of nutrition, they know that mudfish and shells provide iron and iodine. Mudfishes and edible frogs serve as a source of protein. Ricefield-based wild vegetables such as “amti” and “saksakkong” and wild berries such as mulberries, “alumani,” and “pinits” are considered rich in antioxidants. They regard these wild vegetables and wild berries as a great source of energy, so they consume these when they need to

go to work in the fields, either for crop maintenance, irrigation, or stonewalling work.

There is also a spiritual significance for the Kankana-eyes in selected wild foods such as wild chicken meat and “etag” (smoked meat) from wild pigs, which they use in rituals. For example, when they hold the “Apoyan nan danum” ritual, in which they provide fire and warmth to the waters that flow from watersheds to the rice fields, it is considered taboo to hold other food items. During the ritual, a prayer is made: “You, rice plants, turn up as a bountiful harvest, we pray that birds who consume rice grains won’t land on you which our hands have caused to be planted... so that we have some food to expect. Spirit dwellers in the surroundings, we offer you ritual food, partake of the food offering, even as you watch over our rice fields, so that we have some food to harvest. Because even as we plant rice seeds, its grain like the “saliket” (sticky rice) will be turned into rice wine, that we in turn use for thanksgiving ritual to call you, oh unseen spirits and drink of it.” These types of prayers are not only for human spirits but environment spirits as well, which they believe are helping them with what they plant and raise.

Ownership of rice fields binds farmers to perform the ritual ay Apoyan nan Danum (providing warmth from fire to the water) “so that we’ll have some food to wait.” The farmer would state in prayers something like: “you, menacing rats, don’t consume all of the plants, so that we’ll have food supply to expect.”

The prayer is for the water spirit so that they (the waters) do not abandon where they are currently found, promising to prevent any dirt from polluting



Kankana-eyes gather these alumani (wild blackberries) for consumption (left) and harvested alumani (right)  
Photo: Sofia Kollin Kilongan and Giovanni Reyes



the water or the waters' abode. They use a white-feathered chicken for a ritual called "pukaw." The offering is specifically for the spirit of the water to partake, hence, is shared to the waters.

By regarding natural resources such as air and water as living beings, an indigenous informant mentioned that it facilitates community members' respect and reverence to such and urges them not to "pollute" it. For example, the dead should not be buried near water sources. Long ago, burying near a house was considered "kadudugis" (obscene) so the dead were brought to caves; in the case of the residents of Ambasing, the dead are placed at Lumyang Cave. That is how sacred waters are related to plants, humans, and their practices.

In other villages, there are water outlets (balaan) where the water is considered safe for drinking by people.

### Access and Use

All community members are allowed to gather and consume wild foods they find in their surroundings. An informant, however, emphasized that when someone finds or discovers a wild food in a certain site—say for instance, a mushroom they call "o-ong"—that person is considered perpetually entitled to harvest "o-ong" in that site. This is rooted in the belief they call "bulbulya" which provides the person who discovered the resource the right to utilize it and the duty to take care of it. Based on this belief, if someone else tries to gather it, it will disappear or move to another area. Should harvest become plentiful, the person has the option to distribute to neighbors or sell it. The community had no problem with observing community rules such as bulbulya as well as access and availability to wild resources until tourists came along.

In Kani-aw, a hill east of Sagada, wild roosters appear on camote fields. When they do, the families who own the fields are entitled to ownership of such roosters. The family can then use these wild roosters for consumption and/or ritual purposes.

In Ampacao, a hill west of Sagada, people nearby Bugang village carve out "beka," traditional pits they set up as traps for wild pigs. Captured wild pigs are then regarded as property of the family who set up such traps. Ownership of beka can be passed on from generation to generation. For example, Lakay Biag has a beka, which he made during early years in an area in Ampacao; he can then pass this to his immediate kin who will then be entitled to access and use the pit and the wild pigs caught in it. Should the owner leave the community, next-of-kin will inherit the beka. Community members honor and respect the ownership of beka.

As for hunting for wild meat, there is a period known to the community when hunting is prohibited. This period coincides with wild animals' mating season. This is an IKSP that ensures sustainability of wild meat.

Bird catching used to be a community practice, but prohibitions implemented by DENR has affected this practice. Kankana-ey communities catch migrant birds for consumption and some for ritual purposes. Bird meat is usually preserved using salt. It must be noted, however, that invasive migrant bird species that arrive between September and February are treated differently from local birds whose appearance and behavior are subject to spiritual interpretation by local elders. Certain bird appearances can mean the start of planting season or can warn of possible untoward incidents or accidents. These specific birds are not meant for dining.

Wild foods can be both for consumption and for ritual ceremonies. For example, there is a wild bird that is used as a ritual offering but can be eaten with permission from the spirits of the mountains. A prayer elucidates this, for example: "Dakayo ay kabbey isnan bilig, ilaen yo nan ap-o ay mangkik ta sumaa da ay wada anop da da dapay kumedse." (**"Spirits of the mountains, watch over our children who catch wild birds, so that they may go home with many. Strengthen their character and physical bodies."**).

Aside from consumption and ritual purposes, wild foods are also a source of livelihood. Wild berries from different villages are gathered by people from these villages and sold to local Sagada entrepreneurs who convert these into local wine.

### Women and Wild Foods

It is believed that Kankana-ey women were the first to do bird hunting in their culture. This tradition stems from the story of a woman who hiked to the peak of Mt. Ampacao. She reached the summit at night; there, she built a fire using sticks, dried leaves, and grass to attract the birds. As the fire burned, birds appeared around her, and she used a long stick to catch them. She filled her basket with birds, which she shared with neighbors upon reaching home.

Part of the bird hunting tradition is when women are out hunting, men would gather at the Dap-ay (stone-paved gathering area for elder men, mostly decision makers) to pray for the success of women. However, due to an unfortunate incident where a woman was killed by a headhunter, the practice became exclusive to men. With the imposition of a national policy over bird catching, bird catching has declined over the years.



## Challenges

Among the challenges observed in the community is the influx of tourists in the area. Locals have noticed a decrease in wild plants. Recently, the mulberries of Mt. Ampacao are said to be no longer as robust as they were years ago. Blackberries have also become smaller in size. With Sagada wild plants now exposed to all sorts of people coming from different

places, populations of such have significantly dwindled. "Nayusak," as Kankana-ey calls it, meaning detrimental. In terms of wild foods, these are poisoned/polluted, as they become dry and start to wither. "Some tourists are like "suyaks" to our community. We are partly to blame for allowing this to happen," an informant said.

**CASE STUDY 2: THE STATE OF WILD FOODS IN HIGAUNON COMMUNITIES IN MALITBOG, BUKIDNON**

Situated in the mountains of Northern Mindanao are the Higaunon, a minority ethnic group who devoted their practices to the conservation of Mt. Kimangkil Range which they traditionally believe as the home of the Diwata who saved their lineage from a great flood. The Higaunons inhabit the mountains of the provinces of Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon, Agusan del Norte, and Agusan del Sur. The “Higaunon” word came from the word “gaun”, which means, one who ascends the mountains from the coastal plains in reference to their ancestors who originally lived in the plains and moved to the highlands to avoid strangers (Tebtebba, 2011). They identify themselves as highlanders, recognizing the presence of lowlanders who settled in their area whom they refer as Dumagat.

In this case study, the focus is on the Higaunon community of Agtulawon Mintapod Higaunon Cumadon (AGMIHICU) which for the longest time has conserved forested landscape within their ancestral territory as their hunting ground, sacred sites, and many other uses which are deeply rooted in their cultural beliefs and practices, especially as their main source of resources including non-timber and forest products for their subsistence. Their oral history speaks of their appointment as caretakers of the forest and

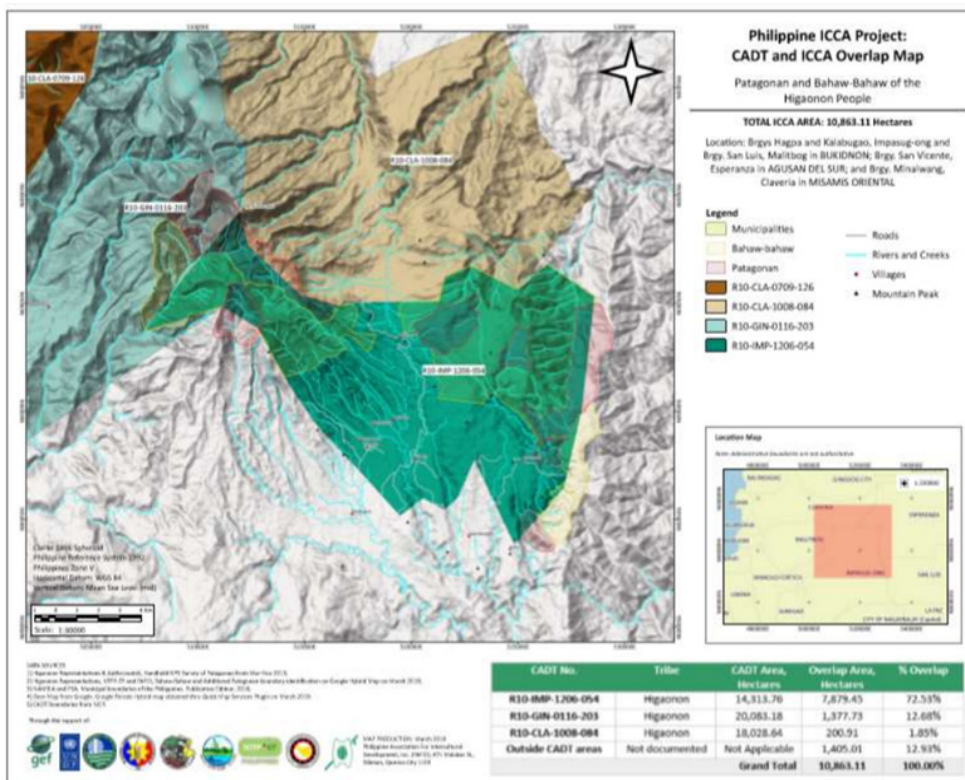
mountains. And true to their history, they continue to perceive these areas and the wild foods they collect therein as the food of their soul.

The ancestral domain of the Higaunon community of AGMIHICU the Higaunon Tribe of is in Barangay Hagpa; a portion of Barangay Kalabugao, municipality of Impasug-ong; and a portion of Barangay San Luis in the municipality of Malitbog, all in the province of Bukidnon. It has a total land area of 14,313.7592 hectares managed in accordance with the traditional management and conservation practices of the community.

For the Higaunon, the mountains and the forest are the elements that complete their well-being. It has been their sanctuary from the time of their ancestors until today. The food and other resources provided by the forest links them to their spirit, a part of their cultural identity. The forests provide the community their needs, including food, shelter, and medicines, among others. It is endowed with root crops, birds, honey, and a diverse array of animals which they could hunt.

**Historical Connection of the Higaunon and the forest**

The Higaunons consider Mt. Kimangkil, a conserved area and forest, a big part of their life. According to De Vera and Zingapan (2004), Mintapod’s origin story recounts a great flood that submerged the entire



**Map 1. AGMIHICU CADT and ICCAs and its overlap with adjoining Higaunon CADTs.**

<sup>1</sup> CADT No. R10-IMP-1206-054 as surveyed by the NCIP Survey Team following the principle of self-delineation as prescribed under RA 8371.

territory until only Mt. Kimangkil remained above water. The sole survivor was Apo Entampil, a pregnant woman who escaped the cataclysm by climbing the mountain's peak. Because Mt. Kimangkil saved her life, Apo Entampil set down laws to protect the mountain and instilled the restrictions to her children over time. Oral histories suggest that the rationale for customary laws protecting Mt. Kimangkil is the mountain's role as a refuge from extreme calamities. Generally, they owe their life to the flora and fauna which afforded Apo Entampil food, shelter, and medicine. Flaviano Amonhay explains that Mt. Kimangkil is to Higaunon what Mecca is to Muslims: Higaunon hold Mt. Kimangkil sacred because the mountain saved the mother of the race ("our mother"), the woman they regard as the mother of all Mindanao people (Community Conservation Plan, 2018).

Today, plant farming forms the primary livelihood of the community in AGMIHICU where abaca (*Musa textilis*, an endemic plant of *Musaceae* family cultivated for fiber production), maize, root crops, and rice are the main crops cultivated. But learning different traditional skills including pangasu (hunting), panlais (traps using bamboo slats), panlit-ag (traps using ropes), pamuhag (honey gathering) panikop, pamataw, pamanglo (fish hunting), among others, are still the first skills men and women in the community acquire. They also gather and process non-timber forest products for subsistence, medicine, and as additional income sources. The community also still practices traditional hunting for subsistence.

The utilization of timber and non-timber products is regulated by rules established by their forefathers to conserve their sanctuary. These policies are faithfully implemented in the communities, thus ensuring the continuous supply of natural resources and maintaining the rich biodiversity within the conservation areas.

#### **Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw**

Forested landscapes, which cover most of their ancestral domain, have been maintained and designated by the community as Patagonan and Bahaw-bahaw, their Indigenous Communities Conserved Areas (ICCAs). These two types of ICCAs have distinct spiritual, historical, ecological, and cultural values and are governed by the Higaunon community through their unique customary policies.

Patagonan is revered by the Higaunon community of AGMIHICU, as these areas are dotted with sacred places and house their forest spirits. These areas have strict customs and rules. The area also serves as a sanctuary for wildlife where hunting and gathering are strictly forbidden. Patagonan functions as a core zone with strict protections in place, comparable to the system in government-declared Protected Areas.

The other type of ICCA is called Bahaw-bahaw. These areas refer to places where the community can hunt and gather forest resources, with the use of resources governed by the community's traditions and customs. Bahaw-bahaw is the community's primary hunting ground, managed and protected by assigned families. It is where they hunt important wildlife for subsistence and gather or harvest non-timber forest products for food, medicine, livelihood, and spiritual purposes. Bahaw-bahaw functions as a buffer zone of the Patagonan. Provided that they secure the permission of the Insaan or the council of elders, members of the community may go hunting, plant traps using bamboo slats or rope to capture wild boar, deer, gather honey, fish using bare hands, hunt forest frogs, harvest rattan vines, or gather herbal plants.

Access and utilization in both conservation areas are governed by traditional policies in resource utilization. One custom regarding access and utilization is the restriction of women from the collection and preparation of abated or the palm weevil grub. Hunting of wild animals like boar, deer and monkey are also strictly regulated, if not prohibited. The forest and all that comes with it is an integral part in the life of the Higaunon, Apo Entampil would frown on her descendants if they caused the death of the forest.

The following are the traditional policies and regulations that govern the conservation of Patagonan:

1. Entry of anyone inside Patagonan is prohibited even for community members.
2. Disturbance of any form is extremely discouraged;
3. Collection of plants, mosses, orchid, stones or any living and non-living things from these areas is not allowed.
4. Cutting of any tree within Patagonan for any purpose is prohibited.
5. A Patagonan will always remain as Patagonan.

The following are the customs that govern the conservation of Bahaw-bahaw:

1. Hunting of wildlife and NTFPs shall be allowed inside Bahaw-bahaw, provided that it shall be within the territory of the concerned gap or a territorial subdivision maintained by certain families or clans.
2. Community members who intend to gather, harvest, and use resources inside Bahaw-bahaw shall ask permission from the concerned Insaan.
3. Rituals are conducted prior to the gathering, harvesting and use of resources inside Bahaw-bahaw.
4. No disturbance, destructive and extractive activities shall be conducted within Bahaw-bahaw including ko malamigsingan on sa wahig (pollution of water bodies), bigsul (burning), pamulawan (treasure hunting), and other similar activities; and
5. Activities such as Pangasu (hunting), Panlais (trapping of wildlife using bamboo slats), Panlit-ag (trapping of wildlife using rope), Pamuhag daw Pangalukal (honey gathering), Panikop daw Panagat (traditional fishing using hands), Pamataw (traditional fishing using bait), Pamanglo (hunting of forest frogs), Pamalagon (harvesting of rattan vines); Panimo ko bulong (gathering of herbal plants); and gathering of other NTFPs shall be allowed inside Bahaw-bahaw, provided that gatherer or harvester has secured permission from the Insaan exercising jurisdiction over the said area.

These policies are strictly implemented and regulated by the head of each gap with the administration of the Insaan. Elders instill the importance of environmental conservation to the young ones as the next generation to stand and protect their Patagonan daw Bahaw bahaw and maintain it if not make it richer.

### **Women in the Community**

The women are considered the keepers of the family. They fill in the gaps left by the men, elders, and the youth. While the man goes hunting or works to earn money, the woman gathers and prepares what the man would eat before he leaves and when he gets back from work. She tends the household, trains the children, and teaches them important cultural values. When one is sick, she runs to the forest and finds the cure. She takes care of the home, supervises all household activities, and extends her help in community gatherings.

According to Datu Benny, the women in their community are even better in traditional fishing. This is because while the men are out for work to earn a living for the family, the women find ways to fulfill the other

needs of the family. The women are good with more intricate tasks which need patience. They are assigned to tasks that are lighter but more complicated like food preparation, handicrafts, gathering of wild vegetables; they are more efficient in freshwater fishing, child rearing, and practicing cultural values and tradition like arts and other crafts.

Women are the heart of the community. They take care of the community, sustain the life of the family, and cultivates the cultural value of the past, current, and future generations. Without the women, the system of the community would be out of control.

### **Examples of wild foods widely collected**

The forest provides all the needs of the community not only for sustenance but also for livelihood. Wild foods found in these conserved areas vary in abundance and use. The months of August to December are considered to be the fruit bearing months. During these months, bees, frogs, fishes, and other wild foods are plentiful and healthy.



Most common food found in the wild are:

### **Honey**

Wild honey or dugos is considered to be one of the most important food in the forest. It feeds the hungry, helps the hunters survive in the forest, an important element in rituals, and cures the ailing. Amay Mantangkilan is considered to be a very good harvester of honey. He passed down this skill to some of his family members and other community members. He recalls that before proceeding to hunt wild animals, they usually take a dose of honey. It's sweet and bulky thus a few ounces of honey can support a hunter or gatherer in the forest a long way and satisfy their hunger. It is also believed to possess all vitamins the forest can give as bees absorb all the nutrients from the plants, fruits, and flowers. Datu

Benny also mentioned that they not only use it for survival in the forest but immune system booster in the household. He expressed the need to protect not only the honeycombs found but also the tree where it attaches to. Because as he explained, bees are similar to humans. The environment is a link to their well-being. When the tree where the honeycombs are attached is wounded or damaged, the bees leave and establish a new comb.

There are three types of bees found in their conserved areas: (1) Putyukan, (2) smaller species of wild bees, (3) Tamusan.

Putyukan (*Apis dorsata*) are found only in certain areas of the forest, specifically underneath tree branches of higher trees and usually, or possibly underneath trees in overhanging cliffs. In harvesting honey/honeycombs, it is important to delicately handle the tree where it attaches. Wounding the tree would drive away the honey bees and tendencies are they will not come back and stop producing honey in that comb. Dwarf species of wild bees (*Apis cerana*) are smaller bees found in tree hollows and tree cavities. And *tamusan* bees are found in large fruit trees and are considered to be the most important and abundant wild bees. The bees attach their combs in trees surrounded by flower plant species.

Beeswax is also an important element in the conduct of rituals. A ritual offering called *pamalayag* to ask the spirits guidance in forest honey gathering.

Currently, they have established a small community-based enterprise for wild honey. But the community has yet come into a consensus on pursuing this because half believes that this would pose a threat to the resource. Being considered as sacred and widely used by the community themselves, over collecting it would negatively affect the natural production of honey given the intricate way of cultivating and collecting honey.

### **Forest Frogs**

Forest frogs are found in creeks, rivers, and other bodies of freshwater. It is abundant in the forest and the community has mastered several ways to prepare it. Found usually after the rain ends, *pamanglo* (forest frog hunting) is done mostly by men and the youth. According to Datu Benny, most of the community members hunt frogs to sell them and earn to cover some unexpected expenses. At present they sell a kilo of forest frogs for 200 pesos.

### **Wild Boar and Wild Deer**

The hunting of wild boar and deer is prohibited by law and closely monitored by the DENR. Being protectors of the forest, and the flora and fauna found within,

their policies prohibit the hunting except for spiritual reasons and rituals. However this has become a critical issue in the community because there are community members that hunt and sell it at 180 per kilo for the deer and 170 per kilo for wild boar. When asked about the absolute prohibition of the hunting, Datu Benny said that regulation and control is essential to protect the population of these wildlife. But these wild animals are part of their cultural and traditional life, once in a while there will be a need to hunt and offer them to the spirits which will be productive as they pray for the abundance of such wildlife and food.

The community as a wild food. But due to the decrease in the population of such, they strictly regulate and control the hunting of monkeys.

### **Root Crops**

Root crops like sweet potatoes (*camote*) and yam (*adupa*, *labug*) are abundantly found in the wild. Although these are now planted and produced for livelihood, root crops are considered to be a survival food in times of hunger. This has become a significant food from the wild which they cultivated well and slowly established an enterprise for the production of taro chips and chips made of other root crops.

### **Herbal Medicines**

There are various plant species found in the wild considered as herbal medicines. There are also roots of flowers, trees, and other plants that are rich in vitamins and considered as immune booster. *Panimo ko bulong* or gathering of herbal plants is usually done by the woman while the men go out to hunt.

### **Fruits and Vegetables**

The forest produces a variety of fruit and vegetables from trees, vines, and other plant types. Widely available are *kalapi* or rattan fruit (*Calamus manillensis*), *tikala* or the torch ginger (*Colocasia esculenta*), *bayabas* or guava, lumbong, passion fruit, and others.

### **Threats to wild foods and other non-timber forest products**

The ancestral domains of the Indigenous Peoples have long been subject to encroachment. The rise of migrants and intrusive private and government-led projects have greatly threatened the tenure and lifeways of IPs. Migrant occupation equates to less control and supervision of the council of elders, that would then result in violation of policies which directly affects the resources found in the domain and conservation areas.

There are cases of illegal harvesting of resources (including wildlife and timber) inside their ancestral domains without permission from the Insaan. Most of the violators are migrants, but some are Higaunons. Because of the change in the economic landscape, the cultural values instilled in the minds of some community members are slowly becoming memories from the past. As mentioned, migrant occupation has negatively affected the control and supervision of Insaan. Traditional policies, systems, and practices are being hampered or undermined, including by State policies. Aggressive development also added to these problems: projects without the prior consent of the community has introduced elements detrimental to the IPs' rights.



The establishment of a national highway is also considered threatening to the community. The construction of highways has impacted portions of the forested areas. Community members are worried that this will intensify existing threats in the area such as trespassing, illegal logging, and wildlife hunting. Datu Benny further explained that this would also affect their local enterprises as this would give rise to more competition. It also poses a threat to the values and traditions of the community, as the younger members give more focus to technology and the cash economy.

The decreasing number of wildlife observed through the years may also be correlated to the sudden rise of population. There are more people to feed and support, thus the utilization of community-owned forest resources has increased, affecting the supply.

### **Panlaoy: The traditional forest walk**

According to Datu Benny, "The day is about to set for our elders. When their generation leaves, our culture may die as well, but this is if we let it astray, undocumented. What we need is to document our culture. It would be nice to continue cultural events, establish a museum or a library, and equip the youth as the future culture bearers." Because of this, they organized the Panlaoy or the Higaunon traditional forest walk.

Panlaoy is the traditional forest monitoring activity of Higaunon ICCs/IPs to their Ancestral Domain. It is conducted by the community every year to

monitor the condition of its territories, especially their Patagonan daw Bahaw-bahaw, by conducting forest walks along the borders of their territory. It is a cultural regeneration activity where the youth and other community members learn from elders. It is also an opportunity for community leaders to reflect with the condition of their forests and transfer Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEKs) to the younger members of the community where they get to know different kinds of wild foods, taboos in collecting, preparation, and consumption of these resources (Community Conservation Plan, 2018).

### **In Conservation and Management**

In the words of Datu Benny: "The man and the environment have a special connection that should not be broken. Nature is an extension of a man's spirit. We go to the forest to eat; nature feeds the man to life. And life in accordance with one's culture fills the spirit. The life of the forest completes a man."

As a community he said that there is a need to strengthen traditional conservation policies. The ICCA declaration in 2019 paved the way for them to enforce their traditional conservation practices which they have been working on for several years. This opened a door for recognition and created good relationships with agencies supporting the same cause. Today, the AGMIHICU takes lead in the implementation of the conservation of the protected area within their ancestral domain along with the local government unit and the DENR. To address the threats brought by development, dialogues and an FPIC are being

secured to protect the rights and the values of the IP community.

The implementation of current policies are enforced and followed by both the IP and non-IP members of the community. Cultural dialogues with migrants also continue, to strengthen traditional governance and relationships within the community.

According to Datu Benny Cumatang: "Cooperation is the future in cultural preservation. It cannot be done by just one person. This action is a collaborative act of the elders, today's generation, and the youth. This is the life of the Indigenous People. We help each other, fill our stomach with what is around, and live with the spirit of the forest."





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