



# STORIES OF HOPE AND STRUGGLE



An Asian Center for Social and Environmental Renewal



## STORIES OF HOPE AND STRUGGLE 2021 SECOND EDITION

Stories of Hope and Struggle (SHS) offer a glimpse into the lives of communities engaging with the Samdhana Institute. Our aim is to give a voice to individuals and communities who are striving to nurture the environment, preserve their heritage and create a better quality of life for their families. In these pages we focus on short stories from our partners in Indonesia and the Philippines, who continuously inspire and energise us on our mission to support natural, cultural and spiritual diversity in Southeast Asia.

This year's second edition of SHS focuses on sharing stories from women and youth leadership, with an emphasis on building solidarity and environmental care, as well as raising awareness of the current situation, needs and initiatives of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#nurturinggeneration  
#findingresilience  
#yesthey can



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Urtatan Indigenous Women: Threads of Tradition, Weaving the Future.....	5
Futures Rooted in Tradition: Three Customary Forest Proposals in West Papua.....	6
Family-Run Nature School Provides Education, Broadens Horizons for Papuan Children.....	8
Capacity Building for the Women Farmers of Sedyo Rukun Group in Java.....	9
Fighting for Customary Forests and Land Rights in Java.....	10

### Cover Story:

Kasepuhan Cibarani customary community. On 7 January 2021, President Joko Widodo handed over the Decree on the Designation of Customary Forests to the Indigenous People of Kasepuhan Cibarani.

Photo courtesy of RMI



# Urtatan Indigenous Women: Threads of Tradition, Weaving the Future

AMAN Tanimbar and DGM-I Programme was held building the capacity of Urtatan women through a series of workshops. (Luther Stanley Wahilaitwan)

On a peaceful, sunny afternoon at the eastern edge of the Indonesian archipelago, women of the Urtatan indigenous community are working at a traditional loom, steadily weaving patterns into the fabric. When finished, these colourful and distinctive textiles are sold locally, to be worn on special occasions such as funerals, weddings, inductions, or other customary ceremonies that play out in the neighbourhood. For the Urtatan women of Keliobar village in North Tanimbar district, these textiles are not relics of a bygone era; they represent an exciting new business opportunity.

Originating in the Moluccan Islands, *tenun ikat* fabrics are woven from strands of warp and weft

threads that have been tied and dipped in natural dyes. Their motifs include various assortments of animals, plants and humans, many of which are particular to the region in which they were spun (there are 41 different patterns in the Tanimbar Islands alone). Each unique fabric is the embodiment of ancestral values; all are central to local culture.

Together with the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) and the DGM-I programme, the Samdhana Institute has been working to protect indigenous communities' cultural heritage and values, by creating livelihood opportunities connected to their craft. We are



Workshop participants develop their knowledge and gain experience in establishing new *tenun ikat*. (Luther Stanley Wahilaitwan)

building the capacity of Urtatan women through a series of workshops, helping them to improve the economic management of their weaving businesses.

These activities have helped the community to develop their knowledge and gain experience in establishing new *tenun ikat* business enterprises. With assistance from the local government, women in Keliobar village have improved product quality, developed business plans and begun marketing their textiles further afield. A total of 20 sets of weaving looms and tools have been provided to help spur this development and encourage wider involvement in the community.

Samdhana is supporting the creation of livelihood opportunities for women in the Tanimbar Islands, through projects that celebrate community wisdom and keep traditional heritage alive. Like the *tenun ikat* fabrics themselves, these activities offer a route to a more prosperous future, while also providing a tangible link to the past.



# Futures Rooted in Tradition: Three Customary Forest Proposals in West Papua

Mapping process by the community in Tamberau. (SAMDHANA)

Three indigenous groups in the Domberai Cultural Area of West Papua Province have submitted a proposal for official customary forest status. Their objective is to retain control of their customary lands, while also playing a more pivotal role in sustainable development for the region.

A total of three Marga (indigenous communities) have submitted applications for customary forest status, namely the Miyah tribe of the Tafi clan from Tamberau Regency; the Baho clan of the Maybrat tribe in Maybrat Regency; and the Ogoney clan of the Moskona tribe in Teluk Bintuni Regency, West Papua Province.

In recent years, these groups have been subject to rapid and irrevocable changes, in which

development has overlooked customary rights, or undermined indigenous communities' access to their land and natural resources. For current and future generations, these groups are taking a stand. Following three years of painstaking work and preparation, all the necessary documents have finally been submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) and the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN).

The three proposed customary areas are located in zones that have already been earmarked for development by the government. These include the Regency Capital, the main access road and the Trans-Papua Highway project, as well as the expansion area of the sub-district. The Tafi and



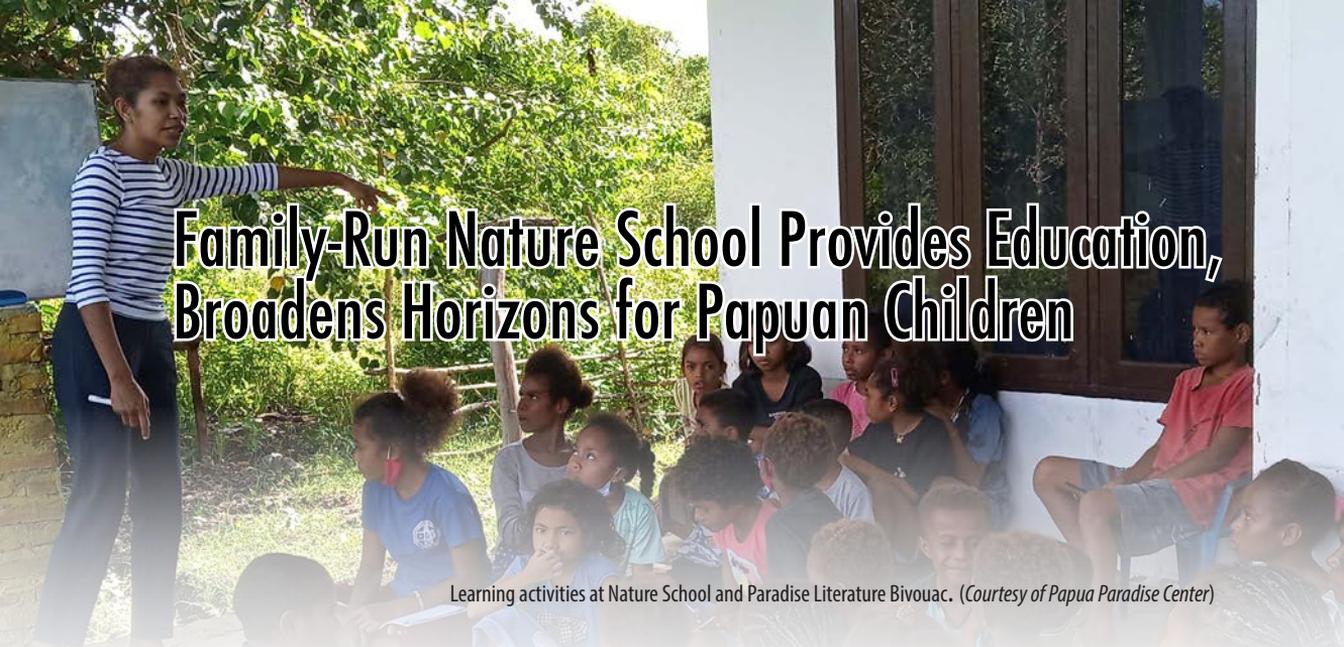
Forest in west Papua. (SAMDHANA)

Baho clans have both seen their lands swallowed up in recent years, as part of urban expansion projects centred around nearby cities. Customary forest status would preserve traditional values in each area, protecting community livelihoods and ensuring land rights are protected by law.

By opening up a dialogue with indigenous communities, the government can integrate customary areas into regional spatial planning; moreover, recognition of land rights in each of the three customary forests would also help support existing government initiatives. For example, natural resources offer great potential for empowering and strengthening tribal economies; the registration of land rights through customary forest status would therefore also support

government mandates for welfare development in Papua, as outlined in Presidential Instruction (INPRES) No. 9/2020 on the Acceleration of Welfare Development in Papua Province and West Papua Province.

Mapping customary areas, establishing indigenous peoples' legal right to their lands and legalising customary forests in Papua – these are all essential building blocks in regional development. Only by securing customary rights for indigenous peoples can these projects establish a solid foundation, upon which a more equitable and sustainable future can be built.



# Family-Run Nature School Provides Education, Broadens Horizons for Papuan Children

Learning activities at Nature School and Paradise Literature Bivouac. (Courtesy of Papua Paradise Center)

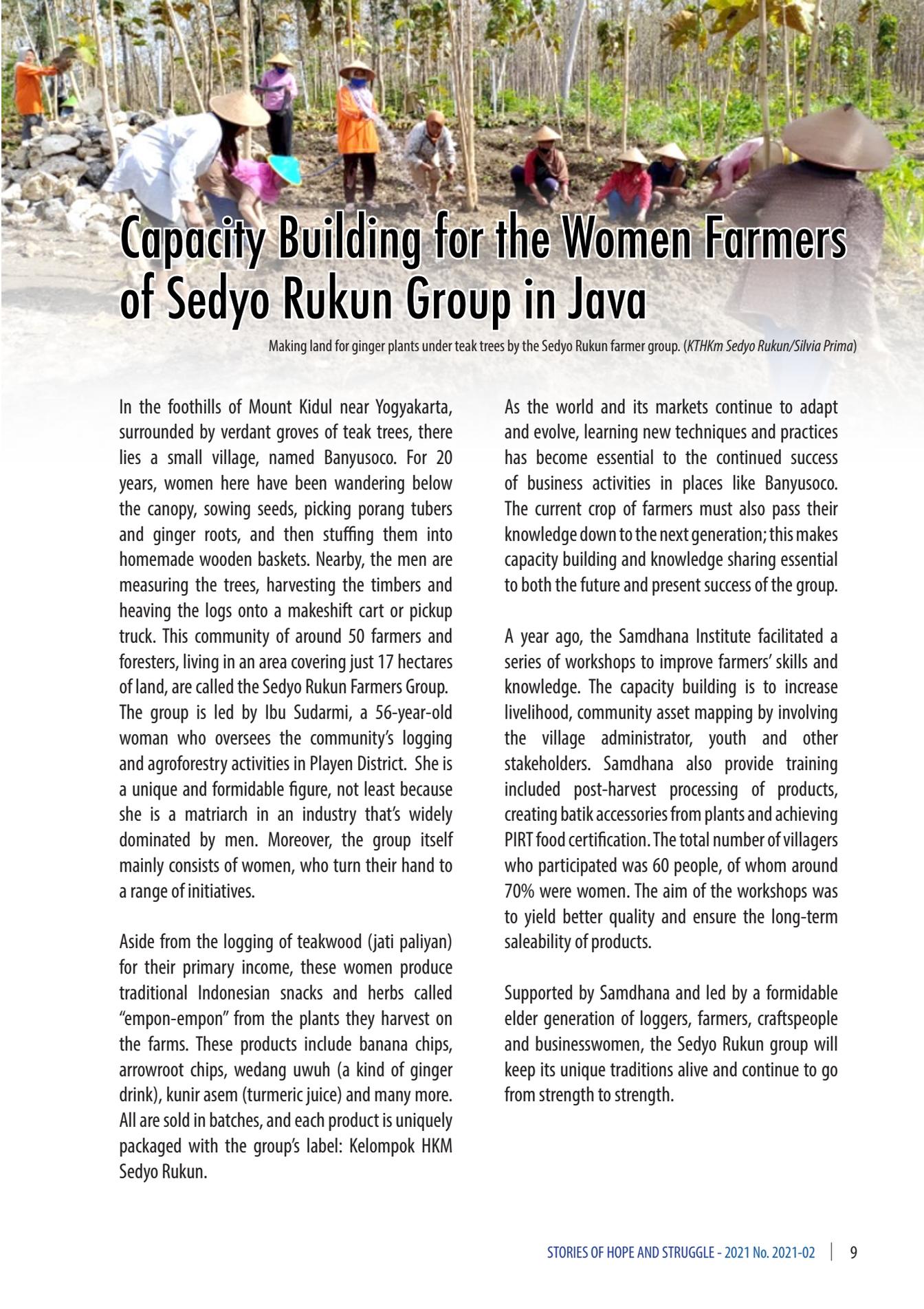
For children all over the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has inhibited access to education. The usual role of schools as hubs for interaction, classes, field trips and lab experiments has been replaced by video calls. However, many children who live in poverty-stricken villages of third-world countries don't have the gadgets or internet connection required to make video calls. As a result, their access to information and education has become severely limited.

In response to these conditions, certain people have been moved to act. At the end of 2020, a married couple native to Merauke in Papua, named Yune Angel and Ayub, decided to build a nature school. They initially named it *Papua Paradise Center*, using their own house as the classroom. They invited young children from the local neighbourhood, aged from three to 12 years of age, to learn together.

These children came mostly from indigenous backgrounds, from tribes such as the Asmat and Marind. To encourage diversity of race and religion among the group, the couple also invited children from beyond Papua to study alongside the local children. Together, they learned the importance of nurturing mother earth, gardening, discipline, character and respect.

In the beginning, the project was short of help and capital and struggled to find teaching materials. Luckily, Yune and Ayub had friends to support them, namely Sister Adriana and Sister Monik, who were already members of a teaching group. These helpers gave the children more materials to learn from, while also introducing them to Sago; plants that are native to Merauke, but are currently threatened. In addition, they also learned about the Maro River and its mangrove plants; the pandemic didn't stop them from getting first-hand experience of their subject matter, as they went on a field trip to learn about the nature of the Maro River.

Today, 40 students study at the school, now called *Nature School and Paradise Literature Bivouac*. Its reputation is growing via social media and word of mouth, and more teachers are offering to participate. This group includes doctors, volunteers and a travel company. To cover the school's operational costs and its registration as an official institution, Yune is making and selling products from local and natural ingredients. This includes fish nuggets, using sago flour; and hair care products, using the leaves and seeds of local plants purchased from local communities.



# Capacity Building for the Women Farmers of Sedyo Rukun Group in Java

Making land for ginger plants under teak trees by the Sedyo Rukun farmer group. (KTHKm Sedyo Rukun/Silvia Prima)

In the foothills of Mount Kidul near Yogyakarta, surrounded by verdant groves of teak trees, there lies a small village, named Banyusoco. For 20 years, women here have been wandering below the canopy, sowing seeds, picking porang tubers and ginger roots, and then stuffing them into homemade wooden baskets. Nearby, the men are measuring the trees, harvesting the timbers and heaving the logs onto a makeshift cart or pickup truck. This community of around 50 farmers and foresters, living in an area covering just 17 hectares of land, are called the Sedyo Rukun Farmers Group. The group is led by Ibu Sudarmi, a 56-year-old woman who oversees the community's logging and agroforestry activities in Playen District. She is a unique and formidable figure, not least because she is a matriarch in an industry that's widely dominated by men. Moreover, the group itself mainly consists of women, who turn their hand to a range of initiatives.

Aside from the logging of teakwood (jati paliyan) for their primary income, these women produce traditional Indonesian snacks and herbs called "empon-empon" from the plants they harvest on the farms. These products include banana chips, arrowroot chips, wedang uwuh (a kind of ginger drink), kunir asem (turmeric juice) and many more. All are sold in batches, and each product is uniquely packaged with the group's label: Kelompok HKM Sedyo Rukun.

As the world and its markets continue to adapt and evolve, learning new techniques and practices has become essential to the continued success of business activities in places like Banyusoco. The current crop of farmers must also pass their knowledge down to the next generation; this makes capacity building and knowledge sharing essential to both the future and present success of the group.

A year ago, the Samdhana Institute facilitated a series of workshops to improve farmers' skills and knowledge. The capacity building is to increase livelihood, community asset mapping by involving the village administrator, youth and other stakeholders. Samdhana also provide training included post-harvest processing of products, creating batik accessories from plants and achieving PIRT food certification. The total number of villagers who participated was 60 people, of whom around 70% were women. The aim of the workshops was to yield better quality and ensure the long-term saleability of products.

Supported by Samdhana and led by a formidable elder generation of loggers, farmers, craftspeople and businesswomen, the Sedyo Rukun group will keep its unique traditions alive and continue to go from strength to strength.



# Fighting for Customary Forests and Land Rights in Java

The women of Cibarani community on their customary land. (Courtesy of RMI)

The process of securing land rights and customary forest reform in Indonesia has been a long road; a journey of struggle and incremental progress, signposted by key reforms that have pointed Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the right direction.

A good example of this journey is the Kasepuhan Cibarani Indigenous People of Lebak Regency, Banten Province. In 2018, the Cibarani Kasepuhan Customary Council, together with representatives of Baris Kolot Cibarani and accompanied by the Indonesian Young Foresters Assistance Institute (RMI), directly submitted a proposal for the determination of 644 hectares of customary forest to the Minister of Environment and Forestry, Ms. Siti Nurbaya Bakar. It took 14 months for this struggle to bear fruit.

On 7 January 2021, President Joko Widodo handed over the Decree on the Designation of Customary

Forests to the Indigenous People of Kasepuhan Cibarani, at the appropriately named Freedom Palace (Istana Merdeka) in Jakarta. The area of customary forest designated by the government covers only 490 hectares; an indication of the work that remains to be done. As of 31st July, 2021, recognition of customary forests in Indonesia has reached 52,352 hectares out of an indicative area of 1.09 million hectares. This means that only 5.22% of customary forests have been recognised by the government.

Following the issuance of the Job Creation Law (UUCK) No. 11/2021, the face of forest resource management is expected to change significantly in future. Government Regulation (PP) No. 23/2021 on the Implementation of Forestry and Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. P.09/2021 on Social Forestry will provide significant changes to forest management in Java and changes



Farming is one of the ways the Cibarani indigenous people to manage their customary land. *(Courtesy of RMI)*

to the mechanism for recognising customary forests; such areas will no longer be used for other purposes besides being a customary forest.

The government will also reduce areas managed by State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) or Perhutani forestry companies in Java. These areas will then be used for social forestry, structuring forest areas in the context of forest area gazettement, use of forest areas, forest rehabilitation, forest protection and utilisation of environmental services. In May 2021, the government allocated 781,600 hectares of forest area in Java for social forestry, comprising 471,000 hectares for Kulin KK and 310,600 hectares for IPHPS.

The latest regulations provide alternative solutions in Java; through customary forests, social forestry and agrarian reform, long-standing tenure conflicts have been resolved. Customary forests need to be recognised, protected by law and given by the government to Indigenous Peoples. While agrarian reform and social forestry represent asset redistribution and improved access, the key to customary forests is a formalised recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to tenure.



# Bringing Back Ancestral Forests in the Philippines

Awang tree palnting. (SAMDHANA)

Forests play an integral role in ecosystem health; they store carbon, which is crucial in the fight against global warming; but they also function as homes and sacred sites for the Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia. In the south of the Philippines, tribal youth groups are working with non-government organizations and state agencies, taking up the challenge of restoring forest cover in their respective ancestral domains.

One such youth group is the Dulangan Ancestral Domain Youth Group (DUYOG). They have set out

to mobilise young people in their community to preserve the Higaonon tribe’s culture and traditional practices. According to 28-year-old founding member, Heartcell Paborada, the group started out with a core group of only five members. “When we started, it was just for adventure,” explains Paborada. “But as we continued, we realised that our resources need to be protected and our culture re-ignited,” she said. When other youth groups in Dulangan saw the example being set by DUYOG, it encouraged them to follow the same path.



PAYO members spend time away from their modular schooling to bag narra seedlings. (SAMDHANA)

For Paborada and DUYOG, this journey began back in May 2018, at an Indigenous Youth Camp<sup>1</sup> in Cagayan de Oro City. The event was organised jointly by the Samdhana Institute and Kagduma ho mga Higaonon (KAGDUMA). Since then, every time DUYOG gets together, their membership grows. As Paborada explains, “every time we get to know someone who has the potential to lead, or who has a concern for our ancestral domain, we add them as new members to the group.” These members have now divided themselves into eight groups: one each in Upper Malubog and Upper Mahayahay, Manticao; and one for each of the six barangays in Opol municipality that form part of the Dulangan Unified Ancestral Domain.

According to Paborada, support from the elders has been instrumental in the foundation of such a vibrant youth group. “We will carry on what they have started and continue to nurture it even further, to protect the resources inside our ancestral domain,” she said.

As Paborada explains, “the forest gives us everything we need: medicine, food, water and shelter.” Restoring and protecting the forest is therefore an important investment for the future of the Indigenous community, who are working to secure the provision of essential supplies for generations to come. “Our fight to restore the forest is a fight for survival; a fight to thrive,” explains Paborada.

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<sup>1</sup>The Indigenous Youth Leadership and Eco-Cultural Camp was also organised in partnership with the three ancestral domains of Dulangan and Higaonon in Cagayan de Oro, and the Bukidnon Indigenous Cultural Communities (BICCAD); the event was supported by Forest Foundation Philippines.

This development has also been supported by Samdhana; in November 2020, a series of trainings was provided in coordination with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), in relation to leadership in tribal youth groups. Following the training, participants decided to grow a nursery of hardwood tree species (tugas, narra, tipolo, anilaw, salong), along with groves of fruit trees (rambutan, mango, jackfruit, guava, cotton fruit).

In neighbouring barangay Awang, the Panlablaba Youth Organization (PAYO) also came into being. PAYO also started out small, with only five members. Seventeen-year-old president of PAYO, Jemie Mambayla, explains how it all started: “our surrounding hills did not have many trees anymore, so our Datu (leader) said we should build a nursery and bag seedlings. We will then plant these when they have grown bigger.” Their Datu also helped to build the first nursery, teaching them which trees were suitable for what soil.

Jemie and the other members of PAYO also participated in the Youth Camp and leadership

trainings. Aside from helping them in the technical side of establishing the nursery, Samdhana staff also join the youth and women in their planting activities. Their elders added extra force during the physical construction of the nursery. The group have since bagged more than a thousand seedlings of hardwood and fruit tree species – today their nursery is home to species such as narra, guiho, tamarind and Java plum.

Nestled in the foothills of the surrounding mountains, the ancestral domain of Awang is of great importance to the local community. “Forests are really important to prevent landslides,” explains Mambayla. “They also prevent floodwaters from getting into the river.” This river is the main source of the tribe’s water, but in recent times outsiders have begun burning the hills to create pastures for grazing their cattle. Mambayla believes the forests must be protected to conserve the biodiversity. “If the forests remain, the animals will return,” he said. Young as they are, the members of PAYO know that their Saturdays spent on the tree nurseries, is for their generation’s future.



DUYOG members from different barangays volunteer to build the tree nursery in Tingalan. (SAMDHANA)



# Counting the Cost of Covid-19: Pagalungan Women's Story

The Higaonon women of Pagalungan set up a communal backyard garden and bamboo nursery. (SAMDHANA)

When the pandemic was declared in Cagayan de Oro, many Higaonon Indigenous People were working daily wage jobs in the city. As whole sectors were forced to close, the work dried up and many lost their jobs. Even now, with restrictions being lifted and businesses reopening their doors, those who have jobs are working fewer hours and bringing home less pay. To better understand the social impact of these unprecedented times on the lives and livelihoods of local people in the Philippines, a small group of Higaonon women have offered to share their experiences of Covid-19 and the social infrastructure in place in their communities to handle the pandemic.

Most of these communities, especially the children, have experienced hunger. In many cases, there is not enough rice for three square meals a day. To make matters worse, food aid from the government hasn't been distributed evenly; data validation of the beneficiaries takes a long time, and food items or cash amounts given have been inconsistent. A family of five can typically make five kilos of rice last a maximum of three days. However, with rice in short supply, staple foods during pandemic have become purple yams (*ube*), banana, taro root

(*lutya*) and sweet potato. To keep food on the table, women have planted vegetables in their backyards or in container gardens.

Prior to the pandemic, men were the main breadwinners in the family; most had regular jobs in construction, farm labour or as drivers in public transportation. Many lost these jobs as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, so resorted to foraging in areas where there were still forests. Many more, including the women, returned to artisanal gold billing; they would go down to the river in the evenings, hiding from government officers who were monitoring the location. Mining is banned here, but with few other options available, many have been forced to take the risk. A single gram of gold is worth around US\$1.50 to \$2, but it usually takes them three days to find even this small amount. As younger children cannot be left alone at the house, many join their mothers and fathers in the river, standing for up to eight hours in the water each day and bending repeatedly to scoop sand into their sieves.

To make up for the shortfall in aid and the loss of their husbands' income, the women were forced to look for supplemental work in farming. Juggling work



Preparing for the bamboo nursery, with kids making the work like play. (SAMDHANA)

and family responsibilities, they joined together with youngsters in the community, cultivating and selling of crops to raise extra income. However, this was made harder still by the recent droughts. When asked whether they are able to farm, some of the women said their families own land, but they were unable to utilise it for growing food, as the land is located far away and is inaccessible to vehicles. With their husbands gone in search of jobs, it is more challenging for the wives to take care of the farm; they need to closely monitor the land, or else their crops will be stolen.

For children in the community, education has taken a backseat during the pandemic. For those attempting to continue their studies, remote learning is difficult because many indigenous families do not own phones or computers needed for online study or don't have access to a reliable internet connection. Bearing in mind the financial difficulties, there is very little money left to buy prepaid internet packages. Many of the mothers have resorted to home schooling their children, but most are only educated up to elementary school

level, so are not very capable or confident in their teaching abilities. Many of these women have noted that their already limited capacity for teaching is affected by the stress they are experiencing due to financial concerns. Another, more unexpected impact of the pandemic on families has been an increase in unplanned pregnancies among young women during the lockdown.

In June 2020, the Higaonon women of Pagalungan set up a communal backyard garden and bamboo nursery. They take turns in cleaning, planting, watering and caring for the vegetable plots and the nursery. This opportunity to work together and generate a new source of income to meet their immediate needs is also a way to get themselves more organized; for many, this is the first time that they have joined or implemented their own project. Along the way, they are learning how to manage themselves and their small resources, as well as encouraging each other to work together. In this way, by working together and being resourceful, the community hopes to make it through the pandemic. ###



The **Samdhana Institute** is dedicated to the rights and values of indigenous peoples and local communities. We envision a future in which natural, cultural and spiritual diversity are valued, where communities can enjoy fair and equitable access to land and full recourse to the rule of law. Working alongside local communities, leaders and civil society, we address barriers to social and environmental justice, by facilitating support and helping to build resilience. Together, we are committed to the wellbeing, dignity and development of indigenous peoples and local communities in Southeast Asia.



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