

Demonstrating BD-Friendly Livelihood Enterprise in Sta. Teresita LGU, Cagayan



Under the Biodiversity Partnerships Project (BPP) implemented by the DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau, with support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the piloting of the biodiversity-friendly enterprise was undertaken in selected pilot areas from the project's eight demonstration areas.

This initiative is anchored on the project aim of developing policies and programs that would provide incentives to invest in biodiversity businesses, including financing schemes to discourage destructive practices by forest-dependent communities, which will be developed and mainstreamed to the relevant agencies and will ensure that communities surrounding the Protected Areas/Key Biodiversity Areas (PAs/KBAs) will see the value, in economic terms, of the conservation efforts.

One case study that bears promising potential in terms of creating a model for a biodiversity-friendly business is the development of the community-based start-up handicraft enterprise in the municipality of Sta. Teresita in Cagayan province. Sta. Teresita is situated within the Northeastern Cagayan Key Biodiversity Area (NECKBA), which lies in the northeastern tip of the Sierra Madre mountain range covering six (6) municipalities in the province of Cagayan, namely: Baggao, Gattaran, Lal-lo, Sta. Teresita, Buguey, and Gonzaga. It covers the Magapit Protected Landscape, Baua Watershed Forest Reserve, Wangag Watershed Forest Reserve, and three Important Bird Areas, namely the Buguey Wetlands, Mt. Cagua, and Mt. Cetaceo.



NECKBA is also considered an important site harboring various endemic species of flora and fauna that are now considered globally threatened such as the Philippine eagle and the cloud rat. Mt Cagua Complex alone has 22 globally threatened and near-threatened birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. About 171,362 has. of NECKBA is considered secondary and old growth forest, while 3,081 has. is mossy forest. Commercially important trees include white lauan, narra, *malaikmo*, *tanguile*, *narek*, and *molave*. A new species of *Rafflesia*, *Rafflesia leonardii*, was recently found in Bolos Point.

Through the efforts of the project through the local DENR partner, a site assessment on existing and potential livelihood was conducted in NECKBA, which paved the way for the identification of a local water-growing plant later identified as *bakong* (*Hanguana malayana*) that thrives in Sta. Teresita's Bangalao Lake and is a Philippine native. The project then forged a partnership agreement with the Design Center of the Philippines (DCP) of the DTI to provide technical assistance in the capacity-building component of the initiative.

Locals previously thought that *bakong* had no commercial value, while the local government unit (LGU) of Sta. Teresita initially saw only the ecotourism potential of Bangalao Lake. The strategic partnership with DCP proved instrumental in the materials assessment and manipulation of *bakong* after they found that it had potential as a new raw material for handicrafts making, which would offer a promising livelihood potential for the local community.

This development was received well by the LGU, which provided the necessary support in coordinating and providing counterpart funds and in-kind assistance in the conduct of skills development and entrepreneurial trainings to the community from February to May 2014 with the assistance of DCP and the DTI provincial office. A significant feat in the piloting process was the organization of the local residents into a formal and legitimate people's organization called Laguna de Cagayan Handicrafts Association, with the LGU at its helm.

Seeing the potential for the new raw material, the project linked the community to a local company which has committed support as consolidator for *bakong*-based materials and products for export. To showcase the biodiversity-friendly enterprises from the project, BPP has been holding a business and investments forum that will gather private and business sectors. It is expected that this would further stir interest and provide more exposure and opportunity to potential investors on *bakong*. BPP is also working on exploring possible windows for financing and investments for *bakong*.

So far, piloting this pioneering model and strategy for local and inclusive economic development and biodiversity conservation entails pooling of resources and strategic planning and partnerships. Through this ongoing partnership among the community, the LGU, and national government agencies (NGAs) in the sites, some emerging lessons could be surmised: partnerships and convergence of NGAs and the academe could facilitate the institutionalization of policies and incentives; the LGUs' support and ownership and the private sectors' participation are crucial and instrumental in the success and sustainability of the biodiversity-friendly business; communities appreciate biodiversity better through its economic values; and awareness/promotion of biodiversity concepts remains a key factor in ensuring an informed and committed community on biodiversity conservation.

As a demonstration initiative, this effort is a work in progress. Keeping the balance and ensuring the sustainability of this undertaking, the BPP has embarked on a study in partnership with the academe to evaluate the impact of the harvest and use of *bakong* on the ecology and biodiversity of the lake. The result of the study is expected to serve as basis and consideration for the LGU's enactment of a local ordinance and the crafting of local plans and programs that would ensure the development as well as the conservation of *bakong* and the lake in aid of promoting the community-based and biodiversity-friendly livelihood enterprise.