

Voices from the forest



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Community members in Danau Sentarum, with Johnny Utama of Eco Traders, come together to prepare *tiking*, or artificial branches for the upcoming honey season. Installed on trees in the most conducive areas, this attracts the wild honeybee *Apis dorsata* to set up their hives. This traditional technique is sustainable, factoring into organic certification.

FOREST HONEY NETWORK, INDONESIA

organic certification of wild honey

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decisions of the extent of exploitation (see his article on his India visit in sidebar, next page).

Likewise our friend Mr. Nerto Colili representing NATRIPAL presented the scene vis-à-vis management and trade of resins and gum in Philippines. He shared the harvesting practices adopted by the community and the aspects of conservation which the community had adopted are interesting to note and learn from. Challenges the community face are that of migrant concessionaires having control over the resources and additional management guidelines dictated by the government agencies.

The Indian canvas of market trends for gums and resins was painted by the Regional Centre for Development Cooperation, Orissa. Mr. Avinash from the RCDC team along with inputs from Mr. Manoj Patanaik did the honours. The discussions that followed the presentation filled in the gaps and completed the picture.

The export scenario of gum was shared by a young exporter from Hyderabad representing D.K. Enterprises. He shared with the group the concerns they as an export house have vis-à-vis gum supply and quality. He happened to be my roommate and his business sense is as sharp as his sense of humour!

The session continued post-lunch on strategies for market intervention and enterprise development as cornerstones for developing the market of gums and resins were debated. The floor was thrown open for discussion and everyone participated vociferously. The tradition of informal talks over refreshments and dinner was adhered to by all of us after the workshop sessions were concluded.

Action in the field

The third day was marked for learning from and understanding the gum pickers. The better practice of harvesting gum karaya developed by Kovel Foundation was demonstrated. Of the two groups, my group had to climb a steep hill to reach our gum tree. Once there, the gum picker showed the steps to choose the tree, prepare for making the blaze, actually make the blaze, prepare for collection and finally pick the gum from the wound in the tree. The entire experience was like watching a film. In the entire display of the harvesting practice it was interesting to watch the way the way in which the tree was treated (hugging the tree for finding the girth size, dusting the tree with a cloth!). The experience throws before all of us the challenge of minimizing the impact of our footprint on the belly of Mother Nature.

Inching towards a conclusion

Back on firmer ground, we deliberated on the ways and means to take ahead the discussions and ideas born in the workshop. The workshop concluded with a warm vote of thanks.

Meeting old friends and taking our discussions on NTFPs further, learning about the different dimensions of gums and resins, and interacting with a variety of stakeholders in this field was a very refreshing experience for me. It reinforces the need for a collective, ecologically sensitive and economically sound response for efficient management and development of trade in NTFPs. This could in turn feed into the designing of community-oriented policies and other frameworks. Fingers crossed!

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A trip to Keystone

By LAI TUNG QUAN, SIERES Group, Vietnam

It was my first time in India. After a three-day workshop on gums and resins at the Araku Valley, I went to Kotagiri, where Keystone Foundation is based. Kotagiri is a small town located in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. It is quite a long way, but it is a satisfying journey, especially if one is working in the field of community development. My experience with Keystone impressed me so much that I recommend a visit if you want to work directly with communities, share in their experiences and feel difficulties that they are facing. It is the reason why Keystone Foundation locates its head office here.

Our group, the SIERES Group, is setting up an organization called the Center for Biodiversity and Development (CBD) whose foci is to work for indigenous communities. Many things are new to us. Meetings among the NTFP-EP and our group members led to my being assigned to visit Keystone – to learn their experiences, especially how they work to become a strong and effective organisation. More importantly, it was intended that I get acquainted with marketing activities for NTFPs, a very new field for our group, too.

At the first day at Keystone, I was surprised with their turnover in 2004-2005 of approximately Rs 2 million (about USD 45,455) from three Green Shops selling NTFPs made by tribal peoples in the Nilgiris. Keystone highly appreciates these products and encourages the tribals to harvest in a sustainable manner. Keystone pays 10 percent higher than local traders for NTFPs that are harvested sustainably.

Keystone Foundation has built a total six field centers for six NTFP-exploited areas in the Nilgiris. These centers function as training grounds for tribal people in sustainable techniques of harvesting, processing, cleaning and parking NTFPs. The products are sold in by Keystone through its Green Shops.

Nowadays, *Last Forest* is the trademark carried by NTFPs supplied by Keystone. *Last Forest* has become well known in Tamil Nadu and is recognised both as a product of local tribal people as well as a project of Keystone. This has helped to keep tribal people within their traditional land, and retain their own customs of using NTFPs from the forest.

Forest honey is a product harvested by the tribal people in the Nilgiris and one of the most important NTFPs that Keystone has been dealing with. The tribal groups, the Kurumbas and Irulas have harvested rock-bee honey for hundreds of years. Their products used to be unappreciated due to unsuitable harvesting techniques which did not exclude impurities from honey. Through Keystone, they learned more about sustainable, clean and hygienic techniques of harvesting and management. Only honey harvested in this way is accepted and marketed by Keystone.

Through the conservation and development project "*Canarium* conservation," it was learned that tribal people used to unsustainably exploit this resin despite bans issued by the state government. Based on its research, Keystone has warned the tribals of the danger of their unsustainable activities to *Canarium* trees in the forest and have convinced them to plant *Canarium* in their gardens. The resin produced from trees planted from the gardens are presently marketed by Keystone.

The lessons I have learnt from the Nilgiris would be very useful in the establishment of CBD and will surely be an exciting topic for the group's coming meeting in Vietnam.

Finally, I wish Keystone to be always healthy and become much stronger in their activities. I am wishing this not only for our motivated friends at Keystone but also for a better future of the tribal people in the Nilgiris who always trust Keystone and want to live in their green forests and traditional land.

I thank the NTFP-EP and Keystone for financial support and many other valuable assistance for this trip. Hope to see you all soon in Vietnam.

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