

IPs and logging

Title Haribon is in the process of completing a project called Golden Forests, Landscapes and Seascapes supported by the European Union and the Agencia Espanola de Cooperacion Inter-nacional that aims to reduce deforestation in Mts. Hilong-Hilong and Diwata which encompass the provinces of Agusan del Norte and Sur and Surigao del Sur. Considered as important biodiversity areas (IBA), these critical forest ecosystems harbor endemic, threatened and restricted-range species like Philippine Eagle, Mindanao Bleeding Heart, Mindanao Brown-Dove and Silvery Kingfisher. The overall objective of the project is to protect the endangered tropical rainforests specifically, to reduce the rate of deforestation by working with local government units (LGU) of Lanuza, Cortes, Tandag and Cagwait in Surigao del Sur, the DENR and other relevant government agencies, marginalized upland communities, indigenous peoples (IP), women, youth, NGOs and POs. The expected results are: a) sustainable forest management (SFM) practices by forest dependent families are in place; b) improved local governance in forest conservation; c) livelihoods of marginalized forest-dependent families are diversified; d) national policies are supportive of forest conservation of the four sites. To achieve the results, capacity building, awareness raising, implementation of viable micro-enterprises and improved forest governance through mechanisms that promote both economic and protection aspects of forests are currently being implemented. Livelihood is very important to enable poor communities and IPs to engage in conservation. Training courses on bio-intensive gardening (BIG) were conducted to provide upland communities their daily requirement for food. Also, training courses on soap-making and rainforestation (the use of native tree species for forest restoration) including nursery establishment were given where communities can sell the seedlings as well as plant them. Techniques on upland agricultural practices were also imparted to increase productivity and conserve the soil. To date, other livelihood projects that are going on are abaca production and fish cages. Haribon works with the Ma-manwa and Manobo tribes, through their organization the Kahugpong sa Tribung Maman-wa-Manobo (KATRIMMA). One of their concerns is the logging operation of Ventura Timber Corp. (VTC). On numerous occasions KATRIMMA has challenged and questioned these logging operations within their ancestral domain. This year, KATRIMMA has already twice penalized, customarily known as sala, VTC for ignoring the customary practices of the Mamanwa and Manobo. On February, the tribal council of KATRIMMA released a resolution revoking the Memorandum of Agreement entered into by KATRIMMA and VTC on the grounds that threat, force, intimidation, and fraud were allegedly employed by VTC. The agreement allegedly allows VTC to conduct large-scale logging operation in the ancestral domain of KATRIMMA. Despite the opposition of KATRIMMA, VTC continues marking trees? a sign that VTC is intent in logging the ancestral domain of the Ma-manwa and Manobo. The IP leaders and community members have sent their complaint to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) to investigate VTC?s logging operation. Given the perceived inaction of NCIP on their complaint, KATRIMMA remains unfazed and will implement the customary laws for their rights into their ancestral domain. Definitely, this is a David and Goliath scenario. Empowering communities including IPs is mostly a long and sometimes

tedious process. Nevertheless, conservation will not happen without empowerment of the people directly using the resources. And if David was able to subdue Goliath, then, nothing is impossible. by Anabelle Plantilla Image credit: Rich Lindie; www.theworldsrarest.com