

Livelihoods and conservation in the Philippines

Title

The Mount Hilong-hilong Important Bird Area (IBA), one of the last tracts of lowland rainforest in the northeast of mainland Mindanao in the Philippines, is the home of the globally threatened Philippine Eagle, and of the indigenous Mamanwas and Manobos. Farming and gathering of timber and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are the main sources of income for the indigenous community. Kaingin (shifting cultivation) is the commonest farming practice. Farms are usually planted with cash crops such as traditional rice varieties, sweet potato, cassava and a variety of vegetables for household consumption. Abaca (Manila hemp), a plantation crop, provides fibre for making ropes, handicrafts and many other uses. The local community relies on subsistence farming early in the season, when abaca is not yet productive. They harvest timber and hunt wild boar, monkeys, hornbills, fruit doves and pigeons during tribal rituals, and for home consumption. But as decades passed, the community observed that indiscriminate hunting and timber poaching within their ancestral domain was causing wildlife to dwindle.

In 2009, together with Haribon Foundation, the Birdlife Partner in the Philippines, the community identified and allocated 424 hectares within the Mt. Hilong-hilong IBA as a wildlife sanctuary. Using their traditional governance system, hunting and the gathering of any form of wild product within the sanctuary are strictly prohibited. With the assistance of Haribon, the community prepared a conservation plan to restore the degraded forest areas within the wildlife sanctuary, and the kaingin farms of selected forest-dependent families within the village, using abaca-based Agroforestry Farming Systems.

The villagers chose abaca production as the priority forest-friendly livelihood during a livelihood prioritisation workshop. A total of 35 participating forest-dependent families received four seedlings each of Durian, Lanzones, Rambutan, Mangosteen, and Sunkist, which were planted in their respective farms within the IBA. Another set of 53 participating families received abaca-planting materials, in partnership with Ebulan Padayon sa Kalambuan (EPASAKA), an Indigenous Peoples Organisation (IPO). The community sourced their abaca planting materials from within their home area, to ensure that they were free from pests and diseases. Processing their abaca into high-grade fibre by hand has been a perennial problem. Haribon offered a solution by providing a portable abaca-stripping machine as part of their broad strategy of supporting sustainable forest management practices. A Livelihood Conservation Agreement (LCA) between Haribon and the Site Support Group/Local Conservation Group formed by the villagers was put in place. The LCA focuses on maintaining and diversifying existing farms through “rainforestation farming” and agroforestry,

to develop the local economy, improve people's living conditions, and enhance local biodiversity. *Charlou Ormega/Haribon Foundation*