FARMERS ASSOCIATION FOR RURAL UPLIFTMENT
Philippines

Equator Initiative Case Studies
Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities
Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, the Equator Initiative aims to fill this gap. The following case study is one in a growing series that details the work of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community-based environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. These cases are intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to take local success to scale, to improve the global knowledge base on local environment and development solutions, and to serve as models for replication. Case studies are best viewed and understood with reference to *The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize*, a compendium of lessons learned and policy guidance that draws from the case material.

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Farmers’ Association for Rural Upliftment is an initiative of the Chananaw indigenous people of Kalinga Province in the Philippines. The initiative aims to protect the environmental integrity of the Chananaw’s ancestral domain through improved land management and more efficient agricultural techniques. Catalysts for the formation of the initiative included large-scale mining and geothermal projects, as well as local slash-and-burn agricultural practices.

In response, FARU revived an indigenous community conserved area – the Chananaw Ullikong, and improved farm productivity through the introduction of locally-appropriate technologies and agricultural practices. Since the initiative began, rice production has increased by 36 per cent, significantly reducing poverty rates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background and Context 4
Key Activities and Innovations 7
Biodiversity Impacts 8
Socioeconomic Impacts 8
Policy Impacts 9
Sustainability 10
Replication 10
Partners 10

KEY FACTS

EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2010
FOUNDED: 1990
LOCATION: Kalinga Province
BENEFICIARIES: Chananaw (Dananao) indigenous people
BIODIVERSITY: 9 sq-km Chananaw Ullikong (ICCA)
For generations, the Chananaw (or Dananao) indigenous peoples have occupied the mountain ecosystems of Kalinga Province, located in the north of the Cordillera mountain range of Luzon, the largest island in the Philippines – a mix of tropical forests, agricultural land, and small fresh water fishing ponds. The land has been the primary source of local livelihoods and community wellbeing. Indigenous settlement dates back to hunter-gatherer times, before the eventual domestication of rice and terracing of the landscapes for rice production. The Chananaw have a distinct culture and identity, and are practitioners of indigenous knowledge systems for sustainable land management. The primary traditional livelihood of the people is farming, and more recently the development of handicrafts. While the staple food and crop is rice, they also produce assorted vegetables, legumes and root crops. Agroforestry is also practiced, with the integration of coffee, avocado and other fruits into the forest landscapes. The surrounding old growth forests are replete with a wide variety of wild animal and plant species.

The Farmers Association for Rural Upliftment (FARU) emerged in 1990 in response to the incursion of modern development into Chananaw lands, along with the associated erosion of indigenous culture. Modernization and industrialization of the area has led to erosion of the local environment and ecosystems, which has had an adverse effect on local livelihoods, deepening poverty and socioeconomic marginalization for a community that depends directly on the landscape for its wellbeing. The practice of slash and burn agriculture, or kaingin, has led to a loss of biodiversity, destruction of the watershed – in turn decreasing the supply of water for the community and for agriculture – and loss of forest cover. As these challenges grew, so did awareness amongst the community of a need for countervailing activity and action, resulting in the creation of FARU.

Origin of the initiative, catalysts, and vision

The original objective of FARU was to revive and enhance the local Chananaw Ullikong, or indigenous community conserved area (ICCA), as a mechanism for sustainable community development and cultural survival and rejuvenation. FARU has evolved as a partnership between the Chananaw indigenous peoples, local government units, indigenous peoples’ NGOs, and the private sector. In the partnership, however, the Chananaw are the key players and architects of activities, action and institutional development.

Foremost among the project catalysts were large-scale mining and geothermal projects planned for the region. While FARU has had success in lobbying against these development projects, thereby protecting their territory, geothermal companies continue to have designs on this area, making advocacy against large-scale industrial development an ongoing concern and priority for FARU. Poverty reduction in what is an economically isolated community is an equally high priority – exploring sustainable livelihoods options for the local population.

FARU maintains a vision of a community where farmers live healthy and happy lives based on progressive and sustainable practices that draw from local knowledge and reject industrial development. Their mission is to raise the living conditions and quality of life of the Chananaw indigenous farmers through inclusive and responsive programs and services.

A five-part programme model

The organization is committed to five activity areas, namely: agricultural development, enterprise development, environmental conservation, health and education, and ancestral domain and culture.
**Agricultural development**

With the goal of food security and self-sufficiency, objectives in agricultural development include improving upland farm productivity; the practice of sustainable indigenous peoples’ agricultural technology for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation; the introduction of gender and culturally appropriate agricultural technologies and equipment; the sourcing and prioritization of traditional knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems in rice production; and the promotion of traditional crop varieties, including drought-resistant rice.

**Environmental enterprise development**

With the goal of sustainable environmental enterprise development and income diversification, objectives include: building the capacity of local farmers, women, youth and children through hands-on training; provision of capital for environmentally friendly, gender-sensitive and profitable micro-enterprise businesses; the establishment of market outlets for local products in regional centres like Tinglayan, Tabuk, Baguio City and Manila; promotion of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems in micro-enterprise businesses; and promotion of local agri-business and community arts and handicrafts.

**Sustainable environmental management**

With the goal of sustainable environmental management, objectives in environmental conservation include promotion of the indigenous community conserved area; definition of the ICCA, watershed areas and local conservation areas; maintenance of community-based tree nurseries and associated reforestation and “rainforestation” activities; and reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) to mitigate climate change.

**Health and education**

With the goal of access to quality health and education services, objectives include promotion of an indigenous community healthcare program that combines traditional and indigenous health knowledge systems with modern health services; promotion and reintroduction of traditional medicine and medicinal plants; and promotion of indigenous culture through holistic education programs.

**Ancestral domain and cultural preservation**

Finally, with the goal of protecting, conserving and sustaining the indigenous territory and culture, objectives have included documentation of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems; designing and implementing “ancestral domain sustainable management plans”; advocating for government recognition of indigenous ownership over their lands, using existing laws; and defending ancestral domain against outside threats, including mining and geothermal development projects.

**Organizational Structure**

All decisions of the organization are made by a Farmers Assembly, as part of an Amung – an indigenous policy-making body that brings together various stakeholders to the initiative. It is through the Farmers Assembly that community members contribute to decision-making; they are encouraged to attend meetings to give input on implementation of project activities. Decisions on the operation and management of the organization are also overseen by a Council of Elders, which acts as the Board of Trustees. The organization retains an executive director, cashier, and book-keeper, as well as seven additional staff members for project management. The Amung Farmers Assembly collectively comprises all members of the organization, inclusive of the Council of Elders, management, partners and consultants. It is the highest decision-making body of the organization and handles the overall direction, planning and sustainability of the group. The Farmers Assembly also holds an annual general assembly.

The Council of Elders is composed of indigenous farmer leaders and professionals and serves the functions of a Board of Trustees or core management committee. This body elects the president, as well as other officers of the organization, and handles the management and supervision of staff, essentially functioning as a working board. The Council of Elders designs effective and efficient management monitoring and control systems; provides and maintains the organization’s vision, mission, philosophy and objectives; is the primary policy-making body; assists directly in sourcing for technical and financial assistance; and helps in sponsoring students to participate in organization activities.

The president of the organization, elected by the Council of Elders, oversees the day-to-day execution and implementation of the organization, overseeing management systems, financial and other related activities.

> “We strongly advocate for the passage of national and international laws that recognize ICCAs as one of the most effective protection strategies for responding to poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation needs, and to then provide funds to sustain these initiatives.”

_Gaspar Ora-ao, Farmers Association for Rural Upliftment_
management, supervision of personnel, and delivery of programs and services. The president is the official representative of the organization and presides over Council of Elders meetings and General Assembly meetings. The vice-president, also elected by the Council of Elders, takes over the functions of president in case of emergency or inability of the president to fulfill their role, and otherwise performs functions necessary for the success and sustainability of the organization. The secretary serves as the "record custodian", taking notes at all meetings and maintaining files pertinent to the organization. The treasurer serves as "property custodian", maintaining and keeping all financial files for the organization. Finally, the auditor designs and conducts internal organizational and financial audits, suggesting and recommending strategies and mechanisms for financial sustainability.

On the management side, the Council of Elders appoints an executive director for operations, finance and administration. This individual manages and supervises implementation of programs and projects; handles personnel development; supervises and provides technical support to program officers and staff members; and prepares semi-annual progress and accomplishment reports (as well as personnel evaluation reports). The cashier performs similar functions as the treasurer to the Council of Elders, handling all cash flows and transaction, updating and maintaining bank accounts and statements, overseeing petty cash, and provides updates to the president regarding the financial viability of the organization. The book-keeper, meanwhile, maintains and files all financial records, ensures statements are kept confidential, prepares monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, and handles all financial documentation.

Partners to FARU provide the organization with human resources, financial support and technical assistance. Where needed, consultants provide technical assistance for personnel and for organizational operations, serve as resources during trainings, suggest appropriate management and operating systems, and assist in the development of strategies for program management. Volunteers are used on an ongoing basis for a variety of purposes, including fundraising.
Key Activities and Innovations

While the major activities of the organization are based around sustainable agriculture, enterprise development, environmental conservation, health and education, and ancestral domain and culture, these are all pursued under the larger umbrella of the Chananaw Ullikong indigenous community conserved area – an area of nine square kilometers in which 40 percent is protected forest, 30 percent is reserved for rice terracing, 20 percent is for sustainable *kaingin* farming, and 10 percent is for pasture land.

The target population are the approximately 34,000 indigenous inhabitants of the community conserved area, as well as the 65,700 indirect beneficiaries in Tabuk, a neighboring city. Chananaw covers three municipalities in the province of Kalinga – namely, Tinglayan, Pasil and Lubuagan.

**Tackling the root causes of poverty**

Poverty in the region is a persistent problem, and FARU endeavors to use its financial resources to support sustainable livelihoods and micro-enterprise initiatives. This is the intention of the initiative’s Ancestral Domain Sustainable Management and Protection Plan: the long-term management of the Chananaw Ullikong in a manner that balances biodiversity conservation and the wellbeing of the local population. Key elements and activities undertaken through the plan include sustainable forest harvesting through enforcement of a community cut-plant customary law policy; similar enforcement of customary laws around reforestation, exclusively with endemic plants and trees; indigenous forest protection practices and watershed management; efforts to enhance nutrient cycling; the integration of fishing ponds and vegetable crops into rice fields; and enforcing customary legal governance of slash-and-burn agriculture and pasture land expansion, issuing sanctions and penalties to violators.

*Using customary knowledge in holistic land management*

Traditional and indigenous knowledge – and governance through customary law – is the cornerstone of FARU’s work, all applied towards the protection, conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity within their ancestral domain. Enforcement of customary laws and the use of traditional knowledge systems has paid dividends for the community, as the surrounding forests have been protected, rice production has increased by 36 percent, and poverty has been reduced by 27 percent. The integration of fishing ponds and the diversification of agricultural crops has contributed to community wellbeing, broadening the base of products for consumption and sale. Traditional watershed management systems – which include land management arrangements that provide for ecological rejuvenation and environmental protection – have ensured a continuous supply of water to the community, both for consumption and for irrigation.

A study conducted in 2000 revealed the production of an average of 90-110 sacks of rice per farmer per hectare and poverty rates of 81 percent. At the beginning of 2010, the average farmer in the community was producing between 122-150 sacks of rice and poverty rates were down to 54 percent. The Chananaw indigenous peoples strongly believe poverty reduction and community wellbeing to be directly connected to ecosystem health and services. Thus, efforts to increase rice production have also led to the planting of over 4,500 endemic trees – through the enforcement of a community cut-plant policy – as well as the restriction of indigenous hunting practices and the conservation of 3.6 square kilometers of forest.
Impacts

BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

The main biodiversity impacts from the project have resulted from land-use planning in the indigenous community conserved area. Within the nine square kilometer ancestral domain, the allocation of land for distinct purposes – 3.6 square kilometers for forest conservation; 2.7 square kilometers for rice terraces; 1.8 square kilometers for sustainable kaingin farming; and around 1 square kilometer for pasture land – has been integral to ecosystem conservation.

The forest conservation area alone has led to the planting of 4,500 trees (all endemic species); provided a protected habitat for wild animal and plant species, resulting in increased populations of birds, wild pigs and deer; increased the supply of water for human consumption and irrigation; increased scope for agro-forestry in the watershed; and the conservation of over 2,700 forest species.

Prior to the initiative, incidence of forest fires and slash-and-burn for commercial bean production were high, practices that were destroying local forest cover. Since FARU began, incidence of forest fires have decreased by 75 percent and slash-and-burn agriculture for bean production was reduced by 50 percent. The latter is attributable to the alternative livelihood and micro-enterprise alternatives offered by FARU.

A flora and fauna inventory conducted in 2009 showed an increase of plant and animal species since the initiative began. Of particular note are increased populations of particular bird species that keep rat and other pest populations in check, helping to demonstrate the value of biodiversity conservation for local agricultural production. Flora and fauna inventories are conducted through indigenous sampling methods as well as more scientific measurement systems, where partners such as Kalinga-Apayao State College have provided assistance.

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

The indigenous community conserved area has also been effective in reducing local rates of poverty. Through protection of its ancestral domain, FARU has cultivated local awareness of the linkages between environmental conservation and sustainable living. By the beginning of 2010, direct beneficiaries of the project had increased rice production by 36 percent, as compared to baseline data collected in 2000. The improvements in rice yields, along with diversified crops and sources of income, have led to a reduction in those living below the national poverty line by 27 percent.

Prior to the initiative, the community was dependent exclusively on agriculture for their income, a subsistence economy where most were only able to produce what they needed to survive and which allowed little by way of support to youth and children for expenses such as school fees or medicine and health care. FARU has since focused on training the local population – with a particular emphasis on youth and women – in micro-enterprise development
and entrepreneurship, providing training on the production of environmentally-friendly and marketable products and handicrafts. In addition to business training on alternative products, FARU provides producers with access to markets in centers of higher population density, expanding market outlets for their products and commodities.

As a result of increased income and employment opportunities, FARU has raised awareness amongst the area's indigenous peoples of the potential for giving local youth access to formal education. Before the initiative began, indigenous farmers placed little value on formal education, as support was needed from youth for farming activities and often the reality of covering school fees would necessitate selling their property or relinquishing use of their land to cover expenses. FARU has provided local youth with support to attend school as well as with employment opportunities that help to supplement household income. In addition to changing local attitudes towards formal education, illiteracy rates have been reduced by 63 percent.

FARU revenues have also been invested in a revolving fund for seed capital to support local entrepreneurs open businesses that focus on environmentally-responsible techniques to improve agricultural productivity. Interest rates are quite low, at only six percent per annum. To date, the revolving fund has extended support to over 9,000 indigenous entrepreneurs, a majority of them women, encouraging self-employment or developing supplementary incomes.

POLICY IMPACTS

Along with other indigenous peoples’ organizations in Kalinga, FARU was instrumental in advocating for the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, which gives indigenous peoples rights over their ancestral land, their ancestral domain, and which recognizes distinct indigenous cultural identity as expressed through traditional science, education and other customary knowledge systems. Currently, FARU is advocating for formal recognition of the Chananaw Ullikong as an indigenous community conserved area (ICCA) and as a Watershed and Local Conservation Area through relevant ordinances at the local (Barangay), municipal and provincial levels. This advocacy work is being undertaken in partnership with the Kalinga Mission for Indigenous Communities and Youth Development, Inc. (KAMICYDI) and the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation (PTFCF) under a program titled “TANAP Forest Reserve Conservation and Protection Project”. If successful, the Chananaw will be the first indigenous peoples in the Philippines to declare and proclaim their ancestral domain as an indigenous community conserved area through local laws.

Chananaw leaders have gained prominence in regional planning authorities, further helping the causes of the organization. The FARU Council of Elders are members of the Provincial Policy Advisory Board through the Kalinga-Apayao People-Oriented Development Organizations Network (KAPODON), a leading local policy and advocacy group. The President of FARU is a representative and member of the Municipal Planning and Development Council.
Sustainability and Replication

SUSTAINABILITY

As an organization, FARU has developed a reputation and strong track record as a reliable local project manager. Members and officers receive capacity building training from NGOs, government, and the private sector to ensure ongoing innovation and sustainability.

The project is environmentally sustainable in large measure due to the creation of the indigenous community conserved area and the forum this has given for drafting a common vision and activities for conservation and sustainable development amongst the local population. The allocation of 3.6 square kilometers for forest and watershed protection has also helped to ensure ecological sustainability.

Advocating for recognition by the national government of the Chananaw Ullikon as an indigenous community conserved area is also tied to the long-term financial viability of FARU. If legally recognized, FARU intends to develop an ICCA business plan based on payments for ecosystem services.

If not legally recognized, FARU has an alternative plan to make their ancestral lands a site for low-impact eco-tourism, environmental research, and a venue for environmental education beyond the local population. FARU is currently advocating for formal recognition of their ICCA through national and local (Barangay) levels.

Placing a high degree of ownership and decision-making power within the community has contributed to the overall sustainability of the initiative. By basing decisions and land management plans on indigenous governance systems, FARU has facilitated a socially and culturally embedded program model that resonates with the local population. At the same time, FARU emphasizes a multi-stakeholder partnership model and owes its financial sustainability and the funds needed to sustain operation of the initiative to its partners.

REPLICATION

A neighboring indigenous community has adopted the FARU model, particularly its emphasis on reviving and mainstreaming traditional knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems. FARU has also received a number of requests to extend and share its project model with other groups through community-to-community and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges and learning programs. The Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation has been a valuable supporter of knowledge sharing with other groups across the province of Kalinga. To date, FARU has shared its project model with communities in the municipalities of Tinglayan, Lubuagan and Pasil, including Butbut, Basao, Tulgao, Sumadel, Tongrayan, Kulayo, Balatoc, and Uma.

Based on FARU community-to-community and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges, there is a clear need to develop a facilitated and well-planned module for sharing and learning across provinces. There is perceived value in connecting people face-to-face, allowing them to share lessons and knowledge directly and to learn first-hand from other farmers. FARU has also stressed the need for follow-up support and funding after knowledge exchanges have taken place.

“We have experienced the impact of climate change. For instance, we used to plant rice twice a year in our rice terraces. Now we only plant once a year because of reduced rainfall. So what we did was to test and identify rice varieties which are drought resistant. We are now producing these varieties with minimal irrigation and water.”

Gaspar Ora-ao, Farmers Association for Rural Upliftment
PARTNERS

Barangay Local Government Units – These units have been partners since the beginning of the initiative and have been essential supporters in creating a common vision for implementation of the indigenous community conserved area. The nature of the support is providing human resources and finances for project activities. The local government units have also been instrumental in advancing requests to receive formal legal recognition of the Chananaw Ullikong.

Kalinga Mission for Indigenous Communities and Youth Development, Inc – This too is a longstanding partnership, dating back to 1990. Support from KAMICYDI includes technical assistance, networking opportunities, connections to partners, and platforms for advocacy at the national level.

Kalinga Apayao People Oriented Development Organizations Network – This partnership began in 2000, with the network providing technical assistance and capacity building trainings to all members and officers of FARU.


Municipal and Provincial Governments of Kalinga – Partnership began in 2000 and has included both provision of financial assistance and support in the rehabilitation of FARU irrigated rice terraces.

Chamber of Kalinga Producers, Inc – Partnership began in 2000 and has included financial support and capacity building trainings for business planning and micro-enterprise establishment and management.

Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation, Inc (PTFCF) – Partnership began in 2010 and includes funding for a two-year partnership with KAMICYDI for the TANAP Forest Reserve Conservation and Protection Project.
FURTHER REFERENCE