

# IN THE HANDS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: THE FUTURE OF UPLAND COFFEE REGIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

*Carmeli Marie C. Chaves*

## Abstract

This study presents the existing conditions of upland coffee farming regions in the Philippines. Using a multiple case study approach to examine selected coffee growing municipalities in the Cordillera and Mindanao, the paper dissects the issues affecting the coffee industry and their implications on the lives of the indigenous communities that nurture the coffee, especially the women and elderly. The author proffers that the future of the coffee industry depends on sustaining and empowering the indigenous coffee growers, which in turn can also help sustain the indigenous communities.

## INTRODUCTION

THIS STUDY PRESENTS THE EXISTING CONDITIONS OF UPLAND COFFEE FARMING regions in the Cordillera and Mindanao, as it dissects the issues affecting the coffee industry and their implications on the lives of the indigenous communities that nurture the coffee. It proffers that the future of the coffee industry depends on sustaining and empowering the indigenous coffee growers, which in turn can help create a more sustainable source of livelihood for the indigenous communities, in particular, the women and the elderly.

A multiple case study approach was used to examine the coffee growing municipalities of Tuba and Atok in Benguet Province in the Cordillera Autonomous Region, Kiamba in Saranggani Province, Maragusan in Compostela Valley Province, and Talakag

in Bukidnon Province. Observations were made of the household and farming activities of the farmers; interviews were conducted with key informants, particularly the elders and chieftains as well as the municipal agricultural officers. The reports and policies of the Department of Agriculture and its regional and municipal counterparts were analyzed.

To validate secondary data, six focus group discussions (FGDs) on the conditions of the local coffee industry were made with both women and men coffee farmers. These farmers are long-time residents of the mountains; they are, in fact, indigenous peoples: the Ibaloi and Kankanaey in Atok and Tuba in Benguet (24 participants in two FGDs); the Talaandig in Miarayon in Talakag, Bukidnon (10 participants in one FGD); the Mansaka in Karagan Settlement, Maragusan, Compostela Valley (16 participants in two FGDs); and the T'boli of Kiamba in Sarangani Province (11 participants in one FGD).

To supplement the FGDs, key informant interviews were made with the provincial governors and municipal mayors, municipal agriculturists, planning officers, tribal leaders, and officers of coffee farmers cooperatives. A total of 22 in-depth interviews were made for this study. The discussions and interviews included exchanges on the roles of men and women in coffee farming as well as their immediate plans for their family and their livelihood.

Data from the farmers association and cooperatives in the five study sites show an age range of the coffee farmers of 20 to 74 years old, with a mean age of 38 years. On average, coffee farmers have four children. Their primary source of income is farming or providing seasonal farm labor. Coffee farming is usually a supplemental source of income, in addition to planting and selling other agricultural commodities grown in the area.

#### COFFEE FARMING AND INDUSTRY: A SHORT HISTORY

Coffee farming in the Philippines is essentially a backyard activity: the typical coffee farm is only a one-hectare lot surrounding the house in a rural village. These backyard coffee farms are a family enterprise, with most household members pitching in efforts to

produce coffee, from weeding to tree pruning to harvesting of the berries. There is a distinct division of labor in coffee growing and processing: the men prepare the land for cultivation and haul the heavy sacks of seedlings, compost and fertilizer, while the women weed the young plants and harvest the red berries by hand. In the Philippines, coffee is transformed in the old-fashioned way of “dry processing,” where the berries are laid out on a cement patio to dry for about two days in the sun, then pound using a mortar and pestle to remove the dried pulp and mucilage. These tasks are normally the women’s, and so are the roasting of the green beans at home and the selling of the beans to traders.

There are very few large coffee plantations in the Philippines. Unlike sugar or pineapple, there were no large *haciendas* or plantations devoted to coffee, even when the Philippines, particularly Batangas, was a coffee exporter in the 1860s (National Coffee Development Board 2011). Often, coffee was intercropped with fruit trees, hardwood trees, or cash crops such as cacao, cassava, tobacco, hemp and vegetables.

The Philippines used to be an exporter of coffee in the 1870s, and was said to have been the world’s fourth largest coffee exporter in 1886 (Bulbeck et al., cited in Castro 2003). Records, however, show that this may be unfounded. Maria Castro, who did a study of the history of the coffee industry in Lipa, disputes this estimation, citing records that debunked the belief that the Philippines was a major coffee producer; the Philippines, in fact, yielded not more than 8,000 metric tons in the 1880s, which was less than two percent of the world coffee production (Castro 2003, 40).

The National Coffee Development Board says that Batangas Province was exporting coffee to the United States through San Francisco in the 1860s, and later to Europe with the opening of the Suez Canal (National Coffee Development Board). Coffee production eventually spread from Lipa, Batangas and its environs to Amadeo municipality in Cavite Province. During this golden period, Batangas Liberica, known locally as *barako*, was said to have been sold five times the price of other Asian coffee beans (National Coffee Development Board). When the coffee leaf rust hit Java in Indonesia, and around the same time, soil depletion decimated the

productivity of coffee trees in Brazil, the Philippines continued to export coffee beans, primarily to the United States and Europe.

Unfortunately, Philippine coffee farms failed to sustain their production. Coffee trees were plagued by the coffee leaf rust and the coffee borer in 1889 and onwards (Luz, cited in Castro 2003). Castro (2003) asserts that other factors such as monoculture, lack of sound cultivation practices, diminishing forests, falling prices, and competition with other crops, contributed to the decline.

From an exporter of coffee in the late 19th century, the Philippines today is a net importer (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics 2010). Coffee import statistics from the Department of Agriculture show that the Philippines imported some 26,000 metric tons of coffee in 2010, mainly from Vietnam, accounting for 54 percent, and Indonesia, 44 percent (Department of Agriculture 2010). As more Filipinos today drink coffee, and demand outstrips supply, importation of coffee bean and soluble coffee, or “instant coffee,” is expected to remain high, at about half of the total annual domestic requirement (USDA FAS 2011).

#### COFFEE GROWING REGIONS

At present, the Philippines produces only .012 percent of the world’s coffee supply (DA 2010). The total area planted to coffee is a mere 121,399 hectares (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics 2011). About three fourths of the land are planted to the Robusta coffee variety, which can grow in low elevations, and which is cultivated to meet the huge domestic market demand for instant coffee. Nestle Philippines is a major player in the coffee industry, primarily in the contract growing of Robusta, which it uses for its instant coffee products. Only eight percent of the land in the country is planted to Excelsa and just one percent to Liberica.

The high elevation areas, or those at least 900 meters above sea level, are planted to Arabica, a coffee variety prized for its aroma and taste. Arabica areas, however, comprise only 16 percent of the 121,399 hectares in the Philippines planted to coffee. The Philippines is one of a few countries where the four coffee varieties are grown: Arabica, Robusta, Excelsa, Liberica, largely due to a

fortunate combination of micro-climate and soil conditions in its wide range of lowland, midland, and upland ecosystems.

Then there is specialty coffee that is sourced from forests in the country. Civet coffee, called *motit* coffee in the Cordilleras; *Kape Alamid* in the Tagalog region, *milo* coffee in Mindanao is “processed” by the Philippine civet (*Paradoxorus Philippinensis*), which eats and digests the red coffee berries and expels the beans. Civet coffee is valued for its rarity and the exotic manner in which it is produced.

Of the three major island groups in the Philippines, Mindanao hosts more than two-thirds of the coffee areas, followed by Luzon, at 23 percent, and Visayas, 10 percent (Bureau of Agricultural Statistics 2010a).

Four of the five coffee producing regions in the country are in Mindanao. These are the South Cotabato-Koronadal-Sarangani-General Santos Region (SOCKSARGEN), Davao Region, the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, and Northern Mindanao. The fifth coffee-producing region is Cavite-Laguna-Batangas-Rizal-Quezon (CALABARZON) in Luzon, whose midland areas are known for their Philippine *barako* variety. Thus, the major coffee producing regions in the Philippines are in Mindanao, except CALABARZON; all except one are mountainous areas.

These figures might surprise even Filipinos, who have always associated provinces like Benguet in the Cordillera Autonomous Region to dominate coffee production. Of the top 17 coffee producing provinces, Benguet is last (BAS 2010a). The 17 provinces are: Sultan Kudarat, Compostella Valley, Bukidnon, Davao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Kalinga, North Cotabato, Surigao del Sur, Negros Occidental, Davao Oriental, Davao del Norte, Zamboanga del Norte, Sarangani, Agusan del Norte, Mountain Province, Benguet.

#### A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

Coffee farms in the Philippines are characterized by a lackluster performance, particularly low yield, due to an insufficient use of modern farming technology and scant attention to maintaining coffee trees. In Northern Philippines, farmers prefer planting cash

crops such as lettuce, carrots, potatoes, and cabbages, which are ready to be harvested in three months, instead of coffee, which takes three years to bear, and which yields berries only once a year. Market demand for vegetables compels farmers to cut their coffee trees and clear their land for vegetable farming. The quick cash from vegetables can buy them three meals a day and send children to school.

In vast areas in Mindanao, coffee trees are stumped or cut to make way for banana, rubber, and oil palm -- all dollar earners whose demand has increased in the last five years (Key informant interview February 2012). According to Aurora Canistel, Department of Agrarian Reform Region XI Director, farmers follow commercial trends, and will plant whatever is sought by the market and what fetches high prices. For high value commercial crops such as banana and oil palm, farmers will clear their lands and cash in on the prevailing market demand. Specialty crops that require a longer production period such as coffee are often neglected or replaced. As a result, coffee growing in the Philippines has declined steadily over the last 30 years, threatening the source of income for about 300,000 Filipinos (BAS 2010b).

Children of Filipino farmers, especially in Mindanao where majority of the residents are agriculture workers, are abandoning farming as an occupation, shifting to more profitable activities like working in call centers, providing domestic labor, and other city-based occupations. This has resulted in the aging of farming communities in rural areas, the abandonment of indigenous farming techniques, crowding of urban centers, and the overall decline of coffee as a highly profitable crop of the Philippines.

It is not surprising that rural coffee regions are often out-migration areas. Population growth rates in the rural sites are nowhere near the rates of the nearest cities [Table 1. Population growth rates in study sites], indicating migration from rural to urban areas. Coffee farming communities are losing their most productive workers to city-based occupations.

Table 1. Average annual population growth rates  
of study sites, 2000-2007

*In percent*

MUNICIPALITY	NEAREST TOWN OR CITY
Tuba 0.58	Baguio City 2.5
Atok 2.02	La Trinidad 5.15
Talakag 1.36	Cagayan de Oro City 2.54
Kiamba 2.46	General Santos City 4.12
Maragusan 1.60	Davao City 2.44

*Source: Philippine Census of Population, 2007*

In focus group discussions with farmers 50 years and older, the emerging sentiment is for their children to leave the farms and “try to get the family out of poverty,” as one said:

*Say kognogip ono piyan mi, no mebedin koma, ket idekjas ni aanak mi i kinabiteg. Nem no sin-arum (mamingsan), ayshi mebedin mi jet mi ka-itulok iren idekjas sha'y uma et en ira man-ubda shima siudad. Nem nu mebedin koma ket piyan min wara kamin emin shiya uma min nay-esekan ni kapi. (Anita, 49, Ibaloi farmer)*  
[Our dream is for our children to escape poverty. Sometimes we have no choice but to allow them to leave the farms and work in the cities. But our wish is for all of us to be together in our coffee farms.]

For majority of Filipino farmers, agriculture has failed to sustain their families or to change a hand-to-mouth existence. The general reaction is either to shift to cash crops or send their children, especially the females, to the towns and cities to find services jobs. Annual crops like coffee are most affected by this exodus of farm labor.

The graying farmer population poses challenges to the future of the labor-intensive coffee industry. Coffee regions, like many agricultural areas in the country, have increasing dependency ratios among their populations due to urbanward migration. The average age of farmers is 57 years, according to Sen. Francis Pangilinan, chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture (Alave 2012).

In northeastern Mindanao, men and women of working ages migrate to the towns where they do not have to contend with the “vagaries of nature and the uncertainty of seasonal work” (Chaves 2009, 265). Data from this study show a household demographic structure where the very young and the very old stay home while the working age youth seek off-farm employment, often in cities and towns.

The Department of Agriculture is concerned about the aging coffee farmer population, but this is only one of the challenges to the coffee industry. Urbanization, land use change, and land tenure issues have also changed the landscape of the coffee regions in the Philippines, especially the mountain areas of Bukidnon, Benguet, Kalinga Apayao, Davao and Claveria in Misamis Oriental.

Many of the upland coffee areas are, in fact, also ancestral domains. These forests are home to the Ibaloi, Kankanaey, T’boli, Talaandig, Higaonon, Bukidnon, Mansaka, and Mandaya peoples. The tenurial instrument in these lands is the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) or the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC), both issued by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997, or RA 8371, is the primary law governing the use of ancestral domains and protecting the rights of indigenous cultural communities.

Any use of the ancestral domain or any activity affecting the indigenous community requires the “free, prior and informed consent” of all its members. The granting of consent depends on whether any proposed activity, such as a coffee plantation, is in accordance with the customary laws and practices of the community, free from any external manipulation, interference and coercion, and obtained after fully disclosing the intent and scope of the activity, in a language and process understandable to the community (RA 8371, Sec 3g).



The IPRA also mandates the preparation of an Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan, which when adopted by the tribe, affirms its ownership of the land and guides the development of the ancestral domain. The plan is a tool that prescribes the best and highest uses of their land, especially the protection of the natural resources and their use for livelihood.

#### POOR AND NEGLECTED

In spite of the thriving coffee industry and their importance to the industry, upland coffee farmers, including the IP farmers, are among the poorest in the country. A survey of five coffee farmers cooperatives and associations in Cordillera and in Mindanao shows a mean monthly income of PhP 3,000 for each coffee farmer household (Rocky Mountain Arabica Coffee Company 2011). This income is below the poverty threshold for the case study provinces, especially considering that the average household size in the coffee areas is six. Among the T'boli in Barangay Tamadang in Kiamba municipality, southern Mindanao, hunger is prevalent, children are malnourished, parents are without any source of income, and most adults are illiterate. Majority of residents of the *barangay* have never seen a doctor in their life. Their hand-to-mouth existence is exacerbated by the poor accessibility to their territory, which is a three-hour uphill trek through the Falel rainforest from the Kiamba town center. This physical isolation has increased the neglect of this indigenous group, for whom basic public services such as power, water, health care, and education are undelivered, prompting one tribal elder to conclude that they have been “forgotten by the government” (FGD January 2012).

The T'boli women and children are particularly vulnerable because they have little education, no stable source of income, and rely completely on external sources of support. The women are burdened with taking care of a struggling household and providing at least one meal a day for the family. Food consists of root crops such as cassava and sweet potato; rice is considered a treat because it is beyond the family budget. The unbalanced diet makes for their poor health and low energy, perpetuating a cycle of poverty, ill

health, and low productivity.

The men strip abaca and sell the bundles of abaca to buyers in General Santos City or Davao, but cash from selling abaca is inadequate and infrequent. The women are preoccupied with the care of young children and the tasks at home that there is little time and energy left for agricultural production. Even if they do, the women have nothing to plant and no resources to sustain their farm. Thus, the farmers' backyard farm lots within the resource-rich T'boli ancestral domain are hardly used to generate income. The general feeling in these mountains is that of resignation to one's miserable fate. The poor inevitably look to the local government for a lifeline, but government is already overburdened.

#### THREATS TO SUSTAINABILITY

Although coffee prices have resisted fluctuation in the last five years – they have, in fact, been rising – farmers are hesitant to grow coffee again, preferring instead to cultivate marketable crops such as banana and rubber. Their desire to survive in an unpredictable agricultural setting compels them to use their land for profits promised by big companies. The land conversion of thousands of hectares of agricultural land in Mindanao manifests the frenzy for growing export crops on former rice lands, ancestral domains, and agrarian reform landholdings. The Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) are all concerned about the changing land uses sweeping agricultural and forest areas.

Small farmers claim that even if they want to plant coffee, they still lack access to affordable and quality planting materials. Moreover, coffee production is hampered by farmers' lack of information on the coffee value chain, a problem that is compounded by a minimal use of modern processing technology. The result is low tree yield and low-grade beans.

More importantly, farmers' enthusiasm for planting coffee is dampened by strong competition not only from other cash crops and other money opportunities such as mining, but also from the

corporate practice of importing coffee beans. Large coffee companies such as Starbucks and Nestle import coffee beans because local production simply cannot meet consumer demand.

#### THE FUTURE OF COFFEE REGIONS

Given what appears to be a bleak scenario for the coffee industry, what is the future of the coffee growing regions in the Philippines? Promising, apparently, amidst the steady and rising demand for coffee in the Philippines and in the developed countries. North American, European, Middle East and Japanese consumers are drinking more coffee than ever, and countries lying on the so-called coffee belt are taking a renewed interest in coffee. If the local industry can be overhauled, it can compete in the global coffee market.

#### *THE QUEST FOR QUALITY*

Recently, there has been a spiked interest in Arabica, the most favored of the four coffee varieties because of its aroma and smooth, exquisite taste. Small farmers in coffee producing countries are planting Arabica again, hoping to ride the wave of increasing domestic and export market demand for coffee, and in particular, highland coffee. A more discriminating market now searches for specialty coffee and for single-origin coffee, such as Blue Mountain coffee in Jamaica, Kona coffee in Hawaii, or Benguet coffee in the Cordilleras. Specialty coffee is not an entirely new concept. It was first mentioned in an international coffee conference in Montreuil, France in 1978, when Erna Knutsen observed that geographic and microclimate characteristics produce distinct nuances in the flavor of coffee (Kinro 2003), and these flavors have an effect on the overall cupping quality. This was said to be the birth of specialty coffee, which the Specialty Coffee Association of America, or SCAA, defines as “coffee that is free of defects” and passes agreed standards (SCAA 2012). The SCAA claims that two decades prior to Knutsen’s speech, coffee specialists have distinguished the origin of coffee beans, similar to labeling wine and the vineyard that produced it.

Coffee processors now demand quality raw material, which means ripe red berries or green beans that have few defects and meet international specialty coffee standards. Berry harvesting and green bean sorting is often relegated to the women, who are considered, by themselves and by the men, to be meticulous in picking only the ripe red berries and in segregating quality from defective green beans. The quality of coffee, therefore, literally lies in the hands of the women growers.

At the same time, improved and ecological coffee production and processing technologies are now accessible to small farmers. Previously only the big players can afford such know-how and post-harvest facilities; now farmer cooperatives and associations benefit from coffee technology assistance from the Department of Agriculture and obtain support from government financial institutions. Equally important, the DA also offers farmers free coffee seedlings ready to be planted in their farms.

#### *MORE LAND PLANTED TO COFFEE*

The coffee road map of the Department of Agriculture aims to reverse the declining total land area planted to coffee and the feeble production volume by encouraging farmers to intercrop coffee with existing fruit trees and vegetables. Intercropping with coffee not only maximizes land utilization, it supports “convergence” initiatives of the DA, DENR and DAR. Coffee tree plantations support watershed rehabilitation and have been cited to contribute to the National Greening Program, especially when coffee trees are planted in denuded forests or eroded mountain slopes. Already, vast areas for coffee plantation and expansion have been identified by the three national departments of agriculture, environment, and agrarian reform.

One such area is the Karagan Valley Resettlement Area in Maragusan municipality, Compostela Valley province. Karagan Valley covers 25,000 hectares of fertile agricultural land, of which 5,000 hectares were awarded by the Department of Agrarian Reform to 1,700 agrarian reform beneficiaries, all belonging to the Mansaka tribe. The elevation of 1,500 masl and the rolling hills of Karagan

are ideal for Arabica cultivation. Elsewhere in the municipality the elevation is lower, averaging 800 masl. In these midlands, the major crops grown are banana, *palay*, and corn. Banana production is monopolized by Dole Philippines, which leases the farmers' landholdings, provides the farmers planting materials, and buys the banana they produce. Similar production and marketing agreements are made between big companies and the farmers for rubber, cacao and other export crops. Even small-scale gold and nickel mining, widespread in Compostela Valley, provides some income as well as competition for local labor.

Coffee production in Karagan Valley is concentrated in eight *barangays*: Langgawisan, Poblacion, Bahi, Tupas, New Albay, Paloc, Magcagong and Mabugnao. About 401 hectares are planted to Robusta, Liberica, Excelsa and Catimor, which is a hybrid of Robusta and Arabica. The coffee trees, aged five to 20 years old, are commonly intercropped with forest tree species. Older coffee stands, some as old as 50 years, also abound in the municipality, but these are poorly maintained and need rejuvenation. Among the Mansaka farmers, harvesting of coffee is not selective, that is, ripe and unripe berries are simultaneously stripped from the branches by hand. The berries are then dried under the sun for two days, spread on mats or on a concrete pavement.

Several years ago, the dwindling productivity and low prices of coffee were disincentives for farmers to maintain and expand their coffee farms. This disenchantment among coffee growers resulted in their decision to lease their farms to big banana plantation corporations such as Dole Philippines and Dizon-Marfori Farms for PhP 8,000 to PhP 15,000 per hectare per year, plus guaranteed hiring of one family member as farm laborer.

The farmers recall that the expansion of coffee production in the valley was triggered by the procurement program of Nestle Philippines. Nestle, however, stopped local purchase of Robusta beans when world coffee prices declined, and importation of green beans became more practical for the company. Today, individual farmers sell their coffee to traders in Compostela Valley or Davao City. It was observed that traders are not particular about coffee varieties, purity or mix.

These days, both Nestle and local companies are actively looking for coffee, and the Department of Agriculture forecasts golden opportunities for Philippine Arabica, especially in the export market. It believes that the Philippines can reclaim its place as an exporter of specialty coffee. Towards this end, the High Value Crops Development Program of the DA provides incentives to farmers to replant coffee, such as free technical training and planting materials. Both government and private sector coffee plantation firms are surveying municipalities, especially in Northern Luzon and in Mindanao, for tracts of land that are suitable for coffee plantation, taking into consideration their elevation, existing vegetation, land use, soil composition, land ownership and tenurial arrangement, and most importantly, the interest of local farmers.

In addition to the competing agricultural uses of land, especially banana, cacao and rubber plantations in Mindanao, the coffee industry has to contend with the stiff competition from mining. Gold-rich provinces such as Compostela Valley and Sarangani are in-migration areas, attracting young men and women to their mines. According to the Karagan Valley residents, farm labor in Maragusan is in short supply, as the youth prefer to work in gold mines where the pay is more than twice the usual farm wage of PhP 150 per day.

The April 2011 and January 2012 landslides in mining sites in Pantukan, Compostela Valley, however, bore out the danger inherent in small scale mining and tunneling without the use of proper equipment and protective gear. Hundreds were reported either dead or missing in these landslides (Santos et al. 2012). One woman resident said that in mining, “one’s foot is already in the grave” (FGD February 2012). Because of such hazards, mining has lost some of its appeal to local laborers in spite of the higher financial reward. The emerging trend among Mindanaoans is to go back to agriculture and agribusiness, some tilling the land themselves, the others leasing their lands to corporations or providing labor for them.

## IN THE HANDS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The top three Arabica coffee growing regions of SOCKSARGEN, Davao, and Northern Mindanao are the domains of upland indigenous communities. The tribes, or *lumad*, have lived in these forests for generations, and their traditions are deeply rooted in their ancestral land. Indeed, their lives depend on the land they occupy and the manner by which the land and its resources are used.

In spite of the provisions of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, however, land use and the right to use and own the land remain contentious issues. Occupants of a forest area who have no title or proof of any tenurial arrangement with the government are most vulnerable and may be driven away from their land. At the same time, private sector agribusiness investments are creeping into ancestral domains. Such was the case in the Karagan Valley Resettlement Area in Maragusan, where *lacatan* banana plantations are expanding towards the forest.

For a long time, access to Karagan Valley was difficult: it required a day-long trek through the forest before reaching the first barangay of Langgawisan. This year, however, a farm-to-market road is being constructed by the local government, which links Langgawisan to the Maragusan *poblacion*. This road, while making it easier for the Mansaka to transport their crops to the public market, also opens the forests to traders, businessmen and investors, and virtually anyone with a vehicle.

According to the Mansaka, they will be compelled to relocate to a new dwelling area further up the mountains when the banana plantations are started. Without a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title or some other form of land tenure, indigenous communities are invariably pushed to the margins by big businessmen, political clans, large corporations and other powerful entities. Thus, even with the good intentions of the government, the community itself is adversely affected by “progress.”

Even if the indigenous peoples have a paper to prove stewardship of the land, their aspirations on its land use need to be reflected in the ancestral domain sustainable development protection plan, or ADSDPP, which is intended to guide the collective

management of their domain and its resources. The ADSDPP should promote the indigenous knowledge systems of the community on land use, land ownership, forest and watershed management and protection, and mineral resource development.

The plan is translated into the spatial development projects and socio-economic activities that generate livelihood and develop resources while preserving territorial integrity. There is a need, however, to examine what these plans contain, because in real life, many appear to be just investment plans meant to entice big business or resource-rich companies to select their area for timber and mineral extraction or massive agribusiness. The preservation of indigenous culture seems to be an afterthought. Perhaps out of desperation, some indigenous peoples organizations allow portions of their ancestral domain to resource-extractive land uses that degrade the environment, such as open pit mining. Then they compensate by allocating other areas for agricultural or agroforestry development.

The ADSDPP is supposed to empower indigenous peoples organizations and protect their interests amid the changing land uses. Unfortunately, many ADSDPPs are made out of compliance to the law or are misused to justify the approval of projects that, while bringing financial benefits, slowly degrade the natural resources. The municipal and provincial governments that have territorial and political jurisdiction over ancestral domains are equally liable for this sellout, because the ancestral domain plan is supposed to be integrated in the comprehensive land use plan. If the proposed project is inconsistent with the land use and investment plans, then it should be disallowed. If government decides that the project is detrimental to the culture and dwelling of indigenous peoples, then it should not grant business permits, permits to operate, and even the environmental compliance certificate to questionable projects.

The law mandates local governments to provide indigenous communities financial and technical assistance in the implementation of the ancestral domain sustainable development plan (RA 8371). Hence, while a certain level of autonomy is granted to indigenous peoples, they are not isolated; local government remains an important partner in their development.

There are five million hectares of ancestral lands in the



Philippines, comprising about 16 percent of the national territory. Many of the coffee areas are in these ancestral domains. This paper proffers that the future of the upland coffee industry depends on the return to indigenous roots and protecting ancestral domains.

In coffee plantations, many traditional cultivation practices are beneficial to the crop and to the environment, such as planting coffee under the shade of trees and avoiding the use of synthetic fertilizers. Shade grown coffee is not only of superior quality, it is the coffee cultivation method that generates the highest carbon absorption per hectare, consequently reducing green house gases, which have been shown to contribute to global warming. Indigenous peoples have been protecting the environment for generations through this rustic traditional ecosystem of planting coffee. They have followed organic farming principles, protected waterways and sources of their drinking water, reduced soil erosion, and applied integrated pest management and biological control mechanisms to reduce pests. There is no question that the tribes are the original forest stewards.

The law itself recognizes and respects the traditional utilization of resources by indigenous peoples according to their customary laws and practices (RA 8371, Sec. 16). Traditional knowledge systems, many of them unwritten, are protected and passed to the next generation by a tribal council or Council of Elders, who also ensure that the proposed programs and projects in the ancestral domain plan fill the self-identified needs of the community.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF SCALING UP

The Department of Agriculture is encouraging coffee farmers to form cooperatives, a strategy that is hoped to open access to credit so that they can break the longstanding cycle of low productivity-low income-weak use of technology.

Coffee farmers need to scale up from backyard farming to cooperative farming and attain economies of scale. Associations or cooperatives of coffee growers can use common post-harvest facilities. Planting coffee at a backyard scale will not significantly increase household incomes. The T'boli of Kiamba realized this, and

established community Arabica coffee farms that are managed by the indigenous growers themselves.

The farmers' backyard lots, ranging from one to three hectares, were consolidated and planted to Arabica coffee. These small farms form part of a larger coffee complex, which includes a coffee tree nursery and vermicompost facility that are managed by the farmers and used to generate income for the 100 households in Sitio Datalbong who are all members of the T'boli of Falel Community Association, Inc. Their ancestral land is covered by a Community Based Forestry Management Agreement with DENR, and is ideal for community-scale agroforestry livelihood projects.

As farmers scale up, they have greater access to farm inputs, credit and other financing assistance, as well as market information, as experienced by the RMC Benguet coffee growers cooperative. The cooperative, and the coffee-processing complex, is the link between the farmer and the market because it provides the technology to make the farmers and their coffee compete in the world market.

A critical step in the upgrade to community-level operations is the use of technology. Indigenous communities are opening up to the use of eco-friendly and culture-friendly coffee planting and processing technology. It was observed that many activities in highland coffee production are currently done by hand. Indigenous women are important workers in these labor-intensive processes where quality control is critical. In the post-harvest activities, depulping is done using a manual wood pulper, and the parchment beans are pound using a large mortar and pestle, resulting in many broken beans. The use of a coffee mill will eliminate defects like this.

Philippine coffee growers need to constantly innovate their processes and adopt best practices in each step of the coffee value chain, from seed selection, seedling production, nursery management, tree planting, pruning, weed control, pest control, pollination, harvesting, pulping, fermenting, washing, drying, hulling, sorting, grading, roasting, and packaging of coffee products.

Scaling up means that the community coffee farms are developed according to the highest standards in Arabica coffee production. At the same time, it is protective of the environment

and respectful of the indigenous culture of the Mansaka, T'boli, Ibaloi, Kankanaey, Higaonon, Manobo, and other upland tribes. This means that no chemical or synthetic farm inputs are used, the surface water and groundwater are protected, no trees are cut, and the soil is nourished naturally. It is the women who insist on using technology that does not harm their indigenous culture and the natural environment.

#### MAKING COFFEE PROFITABLE

The promise of Philippine coffee lies on whether or not it can compete with the premium coffees in the world. While the national government is investing in thousands of hectares of coffee plantation to hike production volume, attaining bean quality requires a more focused approach on planting and maintaining the coffee trees. Producing quality coffee is akin to producing good wine: it takes the right location, microclimate conditions, and the proper nurturing. In the Philippines, indigenous women play a central role in producing world class coffee: they take care of the young trees until the berries are ready for harvest, then they pick the red ones by hand. This labor-intensive process is the only way to produce quality.

Quality starts with seed selection and is especially critical in the segregation of defective beans from the quality beans, a process that, while aided by technology, is still done by hand. Women farmers are indispensable in the entire coffee production and processing routine, but are especially critical in quality control.

The next generation of women, however, may not be interested in coffee farming, given the pressure to earn or augment household income without the long wait. Coffee has to contend with the cultivation of short-term cash crops in the farm or employment in the city, obviously attractive options for the women. Hence, one way of convincing young women to stay is to make coffee a profitable agribusiness. This paper puts forward the idea that expanding the scale of coffee plantation and maintaining bean quality are the secret to increasing the value of Philippine coffee, especially Arabica. The increased value of coffee, generated by an upgrade in quantity and quality, will bring profits to coffee agribusiness. Highland coffee can

be properly traced and labeled according to its geographic origin and the indigenous community that produced it.

It becomes clear that the cycle of poverty cannot be broken with backyard-scale coffee farms. Small coffee growers need to band together, perhaps through a cooperative, raise standards and compete with big coffee companies. Filipino farmers need to take a second look at coffee, given its rising value, and in view of competing uses of their farmlands. The women and the youth are indispensable in the revival of the Philippine coffee industry and in the reversal of the aging of the coffee farmer population.

Finally, government as the indigenous people's partner in development should take a more active role in regulating rapid land use change in agricultural areas and in ancestral domains. Coffee, like other high value commercial crops, needs prime agricultural lands; government should resist conversion of these areas to other land uses.

While all the elements of reinvigorating Philippine coffee are at hand, what is critical is finding balance: between protecting the forest areas and making ancestral lands more economically productive; between developing plantation scale coffee farms and supporting small farmers; between preserving indigenous culture and adapting modern coffee plantation and processing technologies; between advocating the consumption of locally produced, instead of imported, coffee and restoring the place of Philippine coffee in the export market; and between the fulfilling the basic needs of farmers today and a longer term investment for the next generation of upland farmers.

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#### INTERVIEWS:

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FGD, February 2012. Women members of a mining community in Compostela Valley.

Key informant interview, December 2011. Anita Madarang, 49, Ibaloi farmer in Tuba, Benguet.

Key informant interview, February 2012. Aurora Canistal, Compostela Valley provincial technical director.