

## From Indigenous Customary Practices to Policy Interventions: The Ecological and Sociocultural Underpinnings of the NTFP Trade on Palawan Island, the Philippines

*Dario Novellino*

### INTRODUCTION

Contemporary features of Batak food-procurement strategies include the harvesting and trade of commercially valuable non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Often such strategies are perceived by conservationists, the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alike as inherited traits of the Batak 'mode of subsistence', but it is difficult to label current Batak NTFP management strategies as primarily 'customary' and distinctively 'indigenous', as such practices have developed and continue to develop as micro-responses to government programmes (Bryant et al, 1993) and to other unpredictable factors such as ecological and climatic changes. Because of deforestation, land-use changes, demographic pressure, increasing market demand, competition with non-indigenous collectors, environmental policies restricting the use of traditional resources and NGO approaches to conservation, the Batak of Palawan receive few economic benefits from the sale of their NTFPs, especially if one considers the time and physical exertion required to pursue these activities.

This paper assesses the interlocked events, circumstances and policies influencing Batak involvement in the trade of rattan and almaciga resin in the social, cultural and historical context of the NTFP trade. Specifically, we will examine the central and underlying factors determining the effectiveness of policies and laws on NTFP use, management, and trade. The main lesson drawn from the case studies is that small-scale indigenous communities such as the Batak have great difficulties in dealing with and responding to market forces and to the complex bureaucratic procedures underlying the implementation of NTFP policies. As a result, such communities – because of

insufficient managerial experience and a lack of credit facilities and support services – are unable to profitably engage in the trade of NTFPs and to free themselves from long-standing patron-client relationships.

## THE PEOPLE

The Batak are currently scattered across the north-central portion of Palawan Island in the Philippines. They have a heterogeneous mode of food procurement, mainly centred on shifting cultivation, but also including hunting and gathering, the commercial collection of NTFPs, and wage labour. They move from one activity to another according to ecological and economic circumstances, but often pursue them simultaneously. At the close of the 19th century, approximately 20–50 Batak families were associated with each of the nine river valleys that made up their territory (Eder, 1987). As of 2005, however, there were only 155 individuals with two Batak parents, a decline in the Batak ‘core’ population of almost 57 per cent within a period of 33 years (Novellino, 2007b).

Most of the information presented in this chapter concerns the Batak community living in the territorial jurisdiction of Barangay Tanabag in the north-central portion of the island. It consists of 30 families with a total population of 153. Aspects of the



*Source:* Based on public domain map from [www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia08/philippines\\_sm\\_2008.gif](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia08/philippines_sm_2008.gif), modifications by Elizabeth Skinner.

**Figure 7.1** *Map of Palawan, the Philippines*

discussion also relate to Batak and Tagbanua communities settled further south in the villages of Kayasan.

Contrary to the standard description of Batak as 'pure' hunters and gatherers, they do engage in upland farming. Batak have a very complex and detailed mythology involving rice and elaborate swidden rituals. Numerous legends trace the origin of rice to their remote past. They name and recognize over 70 varieties of upland rice, of which 44 are said to be *dati* (old) and *tunay* (original) to the area. Batak fallows include a higher number of useful species than primary forest (Novellino, 2007b). The Batak envision a cyclical system in which the seasonal production of honey and rice depends upon the flow of bees and of the life-forces (*kiaruwá*) of rice from *gunay gunay*, a mythical place at the edge of the universe where important resources are concentrated. Access to bees and rice depends on the Batak ability to enhance their dispersal through shamanic practices.



Source: Dario Novellino.

Figure 7.2 Tapping resin from an *Agathis* tree, Palawan

Batak livelihoods also include harvesting NTFPs for sale and subsistence. The resin from *Agathis philippinensis* (*bagtik* or *almaciga*) is gathered for sale. Rattan canes (*Calamus*, *Daemonorops* and *Korthalsia* spp.) and wild honey are gathered for both domestic consumption and commercial sale. This paper focuses on commercially traded NTFPs, but subsistence use of NTFPs by the Batak is broad and complex (see Novellino, 1999).

## **CHANGES AFFECTING FOREST USE AND NTFP MANAGEMENT**

### **After World War II: The beginning of migration and the intensification of trade**

Between 1945 and 1960, the Tanabag Batak used lowland areas extensively, as well as the nearby coral reefs and mangrove forests that provided important fishing grounds and additional sources of protein for the people. According to elders, wild honey was collected and stored for periods of several months to support them during seasonal food shortages. *Agathis* resin was harvested from tree branches sporadically and bartered with local traders. Domestic root crops and upland rice sustained the people during their expeditions in search of *Agathis* resin, in contrast to today, when they work with middlemen and patrons, and purchase rice to feed themselves on expeditions. In addition, Batak elders in Tanabag claim that their swiddens were much more productive in the 1950s than today. This is because their ancestral territory was not yet occupied by migrants and thus sufficient land was still available for long fallow periods. Batak swiddens cut from secondary forest regain fertility after a period of 7–18 years on average (Cadelina, 1985, p25).

It is only after World War II that the migration of Filipino settlers seeking new agricultural land increased significantly, and roads did not enter Tanabag until 1956. In the 1950s the national demand for NTFPs (especially *Agathis* resin) also intensified. Migrant concessionaires moved into the region, and the Tanabag Batak began to acquire new tapping techniques from them (e.g. the skill of using tapping knives). As a result, the Batak became increasingly involved in the commercial trade and collection of resin (Novellino, 2007b).

### **Increased migration into Batak territory, competition for land and resources, increased indebtedness and nutritional decline**

In the early 1960s, the Batak traditional coastal areas were more intensively occupied by settlers, and barrios and municipalities were established. Concessions to extract forest resources (including *Agathis* resin and rattan) were given to influential politicians, and numerous illegal and unauthorized concessionaires also operated in the area. During the next 20 years, the area between the lowland coastal zone and the present Batak settlement of Kalakuasan was heavily deforested by migrants and logging companies.

Eder (1978) reports that the Batak suffered hunger more frequently during these years, because of the loss of traditional food niches, and were chronically undernourished. At the same time, particularly in the late 1970s, the external demand for NTFPs grew exponentially. As a result, and to compensate for the decline in customary food sources, more people decided to prioritize the collection of NTFPs over other traditional activities. The transformation of the landscape at the hands of migrants not only produced 'spatial disorientation' (Kirsch, 2001, p249), but also dislocated memories of the past. Lowland areas include traditional graveyards and sacred sites that the Batak regard as physical evidence of mythological events and associate with important cosmological principles. The people see the destruction of these historical and natural landmarks as an obliteration of their history.

During the 1980s, Palawan underwent dramatic political change. Nationwide, this period was characterized by a democratic revival leading to a proliferation of NGOs and peoples' organizations. More importantly, there was a radical restructuring of the development paradigm: NGOs were no longer seen as a threat to the elite and bureaucracies, but rather as organizations providing services, especially to the poorest sectors of society (Contreras, 2000, p146). They became 'the missionaries of the new [neoliberal] era' (Tandon, 1996, p182). In these years, the Batak came to be seen as the epitome of a vanishing Filipino culture needing to be saved from imminent extinction, and thus an ideal target for so-called integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs).

It was at this very time, however, that the dependence of Batak on lowland Filipino society increased. In these years the gathering of *Agathis* resin, rattan and honey (all male activities) acquired a central role in people's livelihood. These activities became the primary way to obtain cash for necessary purchases. However, the reliance on middlemen often results in increased indebtedness because Batak gatherers have to borrow money for food to sustain themselves and their families while collecting *almaciga* and rattan canes. The Batak usually 'borrow' rice and other commodities from Filipino traders and middlemen. But even while repaying their debts in rattan and *almaciga*, they have to continue to borrow food, thus trapping themselves in a vicious cycle of indebtedness. Additionally, as Wakker notes, 'credit is also a source of conflicts, such as when the gatherer does not cut enough rattan to pay back the advance or when the creditor does not want to give advances' (1993, p20). In addition, migrants are generally more skilful than Batak at trading forest products and often have a better understanding of forest laws, as well as closer connections with local politicians and patrons, which aids their control of the NTFP trade.

Increased NTFP gathering in the 1970s and 1980s, even as part of ICDPs, did not improve Batak nutrition, but rather contributed to its decline. Diets became less diverse and more dependent on retailed rice obtained through the sale of *Agathis* resin. The integration of traditional foraging and farming practices with the commercial gathering of NTFPs, wage labour and other options resulted in gross caloric decline. Although this multi-pronged strategy increased the amount of food produced, it appeared to be less efficient than traditional subsistence strategies in terms of calorie and protein intake (Cadelina, 1985, p119). In fact, the work of collecting resin and transporting it to the hauling points left the Batak with little opportunity for other livelihood activities. Certain agricultural practices such as weeding were often neglected, and this resulted in poorer rice yields.

Logging also eroded the benefits of commercial NTFP gathering. In 1986, when I first visited the Tanabag Batak, the community in the settlement of Tina (six hours' walk from the nearest Filipino settlement) demonstrated a high degree of social cohesion. In 1987 a logging company reached their upstream settlement and advanced further into the interior. The ancestral territory of the Tanabag Batak was by then criss-crossed by logging roads. In the locations of Kapuyan, Kapisan and Maniksik the *Agathis* trees on which Batak depended for commercial resin were felled. As a result, the Batak lost most of their extractive reserves closer to the coast, and were forced to harvest resin in the far interior. Consequently, the energy and time needed for transporting resin to the coast increased by up to six times – an unprecedented level (Novellino, 1999). To cope with this new crisis, the Batak managed to enter into informal agreements with logging company truck drivers to transport resin to the coast.

In addition to felling valuable NTFP species, logging also opened up more remote forest areas to migrants who competed with Batak for NTFP resources. The Batak were forced to the fringes of their territory to look for new sources of NTFPs. The non-aggressive Batak were easily intimidated by migrants; rather than confront them, they attempted to withdraw physically, even to the point of abandoning their own resources.

### **The rise of environmental conservation and indigenous peoples' rights in 1990s policy and law**

In the 1990s, the national government enacted measures to protect the environment and path-breaking legislation to safeguard indigenous rights to land and resources (Novellino, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). Politicians well known for their ties to destructive logging operations now turned 'green'. Environmentalists, policy-makers and even many businessmen claimed to embrace the 'sustainable development' paradigm (Bello, 2004). Examples of these policy efforts, which combined sustainability objectives with indigenous peoples' rights, were the community-based forest management agreements (CBFMAs) and the proliferation of ICDPs carried out by NGOs. As we shall see, these projects and programmes had a significant impact on people's ability to manage NTFPs.

#### *The coming into being of 'negotiated' contracts*

In the early 1990s NGOs in Palawan began to support and facilitate the shift of NTFP licences from private concessionaires to indigenous communities. So-called 'negotiated' contracts were now concluded with associations of indigenous peoples mainly from Tagbanua communities. In 1990, some Tagbanua formed their own legally registered association known as SAMAKA (Samahan sa Maoyon ng mga Katutubo, or Association of Indigenous People in Maoyon) and obtained from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) a contract for the extraction of rattan in a concession area that included their traditional territory as well as that of other groups. For the first time in the history of Palawan, a concession was released directly to indigenous communities, and this appeared to be a turning point on the way to liberation from patronage and exploitation by middlemen.

Soon, however, the initiative began to exhibit some controversial features: the concession released to SAMAKA encompassed the area inhabited by Batak communities that

were not members of the organization. At that time, the Tagbanua and Batak resolved the matter peacefully and SAMAKA agreed not to extract rattan from the ancestral territory of the Tanabag Batak. However, after a few months of operation, the absence of credit facilities and insufficient managerial experience forced SAMAKA to borrow money from the Chinese businessmen in control of the rattan trade. To pay back these debts, the SAMAKA gatherers had to increase their rattan production, and thus encroach again on Batak territory. This was the cause of severe social tension between the two groups. Eventually, SAMAKA had no option but to sell its invoices for rattan shipments to moneylenders. As a result, its associates went from being resource managers to labourers in their own concession.

### *The Strategic Environmental Plan*

Republic Act 7611, also known as the SEP (Strategic Environmental Plan), was enacted in June 1992. It established the legal basis for the protection and management of the environment in Palawan. Protective measures proposed by the law include the demarcation of areas as either off-limits to the human population or reserved for local 'indigenous cultural communities' (ICC), or both (Novellino, 2000a, 2000b).

The SEP law provides a comprehensive framework for sustainable development and contains a package of strategies to prevent further environmental degradation. The centrepiece is the establishment of the Environmentally Critical Areas Network (ECAN), which places most of the province under controlled development. The law establishes that core zones (e.g. habitats of endemic and rare species on steep slopes, primary forest and areas above 1000m elevation)

*shall be fully and strictly protected and maintained free of human disruption .... Exceptions, however, may be granted to traditional uses of tribal communities of these areas for minimal and soft impact gathering of forest species for ceremonial and medicinal purposes. (Congress of the Philippines, 1992, p101)*

The ECAN core zones, however, coincide with large portions of the Batak hunting and gathering ground. The resin of *Agathis* trees, for example, is usually extracted in commercial quantities from forest around 1000m above sea level, now classified as 'core zones' (Novellino, 2003b). Having been pushed to the fringes of their territories over the preceding decades, the Batak were now informed that these very areas – remote, steep and high altitude – were the priorities for conservation in the region and activities within them should be carefully controlled.

### *Community-based forest management agreements*

The CBFMAs are part of a policy of the DENR that allows local communities to manage forests that have been converted to non-timber uses. One of its objectives is to develop self-sustaining production systems in the uplands by replacing indigenous swidden practices with permanent forms of agriculture (Novellino, 2003a). However, despite their seemingly lofty objectives, including more participatory approaches to forest management, CBFMAs appear to deny indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestral land, reducing them to stewards and guards of public land.

For example, in the agreement entered into between the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office and the Association of Batak of Tina, it is specified that the indigenous beneficiaries should 'immediately assume responsibility for the protection of the entire forest-land within the CBFM area against illegal logging and other unauthorized extraction of forest products, slash-and-burn agriculture (*kaingin*), forest and grassland fires, and other forms of forest destruction, and assist DENR in the prosecution of violators of forestry and environmental laws' (Novellino, 2007a). In effect, the contract requires the Batak to guard their area from their own practices, such as swidden cultivation. The CBFMA does not recognize the claims of indigenous communities over their ancestral domain and instead places indigenous forest management under government control, using the people, in effect, as subcontractors of the DENR.

With a CBFMA in place, things turned out to be even worse for the Batak than they expected. They were unable to fulfil most of the bureaucratic obligations associated with their CBFMA, and did not submit their Annual Work Plan and Community Resource Management Framework to the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office. These reports have to be written according to strict government standards, but the Batak are illiterate. Because they did not produce these reports, the DENR withdrew the permits the Batak needed to sell NTFPs (Novellino, 2007a). Communities in Palawan are often illiterate, and lack of managerial and administrative experience is common.

In addition, the Tanabag Batak were unable to control the entry of illegal gatherers from the neighbouring Tarabanan valley into their area, resulting in the overharvesting of important species. The rights included in CBFMAs proved worthless since communities were not sufficiently empowered to defend such rights within their territories.

In the early 2000s, the drastic reduction of agricultural production caused by the combined effect of El Niño and La Niña (see 'External factors with major impacts on NTFPs' below) and the sudden collapse of copra prices in the national and international market (Novellino, 2007b), followed by the economic uncertainties of the Asian financial crisis, forced lowland migrants and coastal residents to increase the collection of NTFPs on indigenous land. The destructive tapping techniques employed by migrant Filipino gatherers, involving cuts exceeding the thickness of the bark, resulted in the destruction of the cambium (the thin layer between the wood and the bark), exposing the tree to attack from termites and fungi (Callo, 1995; Novellino, 1999). As a result, many *Agathis* trees became unproductive and died, and the most important source of Batak income (*almaciga*) was severely depleted. All this was happening at a time when agricultural production had collapsed after years of city government prohibition on swidden cultivation (see 'Policies to replace shifting cultivation with "alternatives"' below).

Because they lack financial capital and have limited technical skill in dealing with buyers, the Batak also struggle to create beneficial deals. It is difficult for communities to participate in the NTFP trade equitably if credit is not available to underpin their bargaining power with traders and allow them to respond to market cycles. In some older and established cases, there have been advantages for the Batak in their patron-client relationship with middlemen, particularly during the cyclical and seasonal periods of food shortage. As Platteau (1995, p767) notes, 'patron-client ties are



not limited to transaction of economic goods and services but also include symbolic exchange of personal favours and obligations'. Although this relationship is inequitable and in need of reform, the Batak tolerate a certain level of inequity in order to avoid the worst-case scenario: total exclusion from local and regional networks.

The rise of environmental law and indigenous peoples' rights in the 1990s also created a situation in which NTFP law became inherently confusing. The state has made little effort to harmonize overlapping and contradictory laws that are often implemented at the same time, in the same region and within the same community. Such laws, on the one hand, restrict people's access to protected areas and, on the other, pursue a community-based approach to the management of natural resources. This contradictory and ambiguous situation results in a confused understanding of policies on the part of local communities and fosters increased disenchantment towards state agencies.

### Policies to replace shifting cultivation with 'alternatives'

In 1992, a new goal of the DENR was to reforest 600,000ha in five years. Little information existed and less effort was expended, however, on identifying how much of this area consisted, in fact, of indigenous swiddens under fallow. At this time, the replacement of shifting cultivation with alternative livelihood practices (e.g. the sustainable harvesting of NTFPs for the market) became one of the cornerstones of DENR community forestry programmes, as it was of environment departments around the world.

The result in Palawan was that indigenous peoples were no longer able to practice their traditional forms of agriculture. By the late 1990s, several members of the Tanabag Batak complained that their fields had become *maniwang* (thin), in the sense of being infertile and with poor yields. For instance, according to Ubad, the eldest Batak in Tanabag,

*because of government restrictions to cut old fallow forest, the people clear their swidden plots after three to five years, when trees have not even reached the size of a leg. When you burn them, little ashes are produced – not enough to make your rice healthy. (Interview with author, 15 August 2005)*

At the local level, Edward Hagedorn, city mayor of Puerto Princesa municipality, enforced a ban against shifting cultivation in 1994. In the same year, the rice yields of Batak and Tagbanua communities fell dramatically and the people faced severe hardship. The ban altered the entire indigenous agricultural system, and local varieties eventually became rare or even extinct. Such a prohibition flagrantly violated major tenets of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 (Republic Act 8371, (Congress of the Philippines, 1997)) that recognized, protected and promoted the rights of indigenous cultural communities. However, as a result of Survival International's campaign in 1996, the Mayor of Puerto Princesa City allowed indigenous communities to cultivate small swiddens using controlled burning methods, but this arrangement has not been formalized and recent evidence indicates that city government anti-shifting cultivation measures are still enforced with vigour. Ultimately, hundreds of indigenous people had little choice but to exponentially increase the collection and sale of rattan,

almaciga resin and honey to compensate for the loss of agricultural production, with significant negative impacts on these species' populations (Novellino, 1999, 2007b).

During these years, the 'alternative to shifting cultivation' paradigm was also embraced by local environmental organizations. In 1994, the NGO Haribon-Palawan implemented an ICDP among the Tanabag Batak that was financed through the technical assistance of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). A major objective of the project, much like the government's at the time, was to 'shift from *kaingin* [swidden] to sustainable upland agriculture' (Haribon-Palawan and IUCN, 1996). A technical evaluation of the project in 1997 found that the lack of legal recognition of Batak resources was a major cause of low motivation among the beneficiaries. The report further stated that 'as long as the local communities do not have control of the NTFP resources, other planned project activities such as Community Based Sustainable Resource Management (CBSRM), processing and marketing are interesting (theoretical) studies but remain meaningless' (Bech, 1997, p10).

In another example, a memorandum of agreement was signed in 2003 between the European Commission, the United Nations (UN) Development Programme, the Small Grants Program for Operations to Promote Tropical Forests and the TagBalay Foundation Inc. to finance the Community Development and Mobilization for Forest Development and Protection project in Bayatao, Barangay Tagabinet, central Palawan, in order to develop the ancestral domain title among the Batak and Tagbanua and to provide alternative livelihood opportunities. The project had offered little in representative participation or consensus, as community members complained that the prominent Tagbanua person chosen by Edward Hagedorn (who, besides being mayor of Puerto Princesa, is chairman of the TagBalay Foundation) had misrepresented their interests. The project, further supported by NPO2050 and Cosmo Oi in Japan, invested considerable energy in educating and training indigenous women on eri-silk-worm rearing. Despite these investments, however, women – because of cultural prohibitions – refused to bring the rearing cages and silkworms into their households to engage in family-based silk production. Rather than invest in a new form of livelihood with uncertain economic outcomes, they preferred to continue their daily subsistence activities. As a result, production of quality cocoons and finished products remained low and most of the material for the project (spinning wheels, boiling equipment, etc.) remained unused.

In addition – in order to show Tagbalay's commitment towards conservation – a nursery of the useful species ipil (*Intsia bijuga*) was established, but failed. However, a few days before the arrival of the donors' delegation, the indigenous members of the Bayatao and Kayasan communities were asked to collect wildlings of ipil, narra (*Pterocarpus indicus*), and almaciga (*Agathis philippinensis*) for the nursery. In less than 15 days a project nursery was created with almost 10,000 plants, most of which also failed within days of the donor delegation's departure (Novellino and Dressler, in press).

These and similar projects in the region are designed to support environmental protection and the business of conservation, rather than indigenous communities' livelihoods, and suffer from similar institutional and bureaucratic problems to those impairing government programmes, since most of the funds are available only to legally recognized entities with at least two years' experience. As a result, most indigenous communities are excluded from applying, unless an NGO helps by acting as

project proponent and administrator. While NGOs can assist their indigenous partners with the operational aspects of project implementation, too often the result is projects that further disempower local communities. Both NGO and government programmes in the region are largely conceived by external agents, and local people are asked to participate with little genuine consultation. This kind of 'participation' often interferes with traditional Batak patterns of food procurement and makes the community more vulnerable to outside forces over which they have no control. As Contreras has argued,

*Fund-driven programming has bureaucratized participatory efforts and has somewhat eroded the potential for nonbureaucratic modes of organizing. The unwarranted appropriation of participatory approaches has led to the proliferation of programs and strategies which confuse, rather than induce, meaningful empowerment. (Contreras, 2000, p145)*

We have good reason to believe that in the 1970s, at the height of the Marcos dictatorship, the Batak were much better off, and were still able to carry out most of their swidden practices undisturbed. Yet it was in 1975, during Ferdinand Marcos' time, that the state prohibition on slash-and-burn cultivation was reinstated through Presidential Decree No. 705; and it was in 1976 that one-third of the total land area of Palawan was given to timber concessions (Conelly, 1996). Nevertheless, in Marcos' day the state had limited capacity to control remote communities, partly because, unlike today, it could not obtain the collaboration of non-government and people's organizations. The latter were perceived as enemies of the state and, in many instances, banned and suppressed. Furthermore, the Batak were too geographically marginal and politically insignificant to warrant attention. More importantly, northern Palawan was not a site of insurgency, and thus the state did not try to gain firm control over the province.

It was only in the late 1980s that the Batak fully emerged from their 'political isolation' and, particularly in the 1990s, began to interact 'freely' with government and non-government agencies. As Foucault (1982, p221) puts it, not only is freedom the precondition for power, but 'power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free'. In the 1990s, through devolution, government programmes and NGO projects, the Batak were no longer displaced outside the boundaries of the state. Rather, they became recipients of external assistance and were invited to 'participate' in meetings and seminars and to settle down closer to the coast. Thus they become 'locatable' and 'being locatable, local peoples are those who can be observed, reached and manipulated as and when required' (Asad, 1993, p9).

## **EXTERNAL FACTORS WITH MAJOR IMPACTS ON NTFPS**

---

### **NTFPs and climate change**

In addition to legal and policy developments promoting the environment and indigenous rights, the late 1990s were characterized by climatic changes and unpredictable seasonal fluctuations that had a dramatic impact on people's livelihood. In some ways,

the increase in temperature registered during El Niño encouraged the harvesting of certain NTFPs. For instance, according to the Batak, the dry weather improved the production of *Agathis* resin. In Palawan, resin production decreases during the wet season, when the rain dilutes and washes away the exudates from tree trunks, and increases in hot, dry weather conditions. The dry weather experienced during El Niño also simplified the collection of rattan canes. According to the Batak, tree trunks and vines were less slippery during El Niño and could be climbed more easily to within reach of the terminal part of the rattan palms. However, these benefits were largely offset by a multitude of negative effects affecting other spheres of people's livelihoods. For example, the soil became hard and dry, so cassava plants grew higher but produced small or no tubers at all, and upland rice production dropped dramatically. Wild fruit trees and banana bore little or no fruit, which also affected the population of game animals (e.g. boars and monkeys); pollen-producing vines and trees did not bear flowers, causing honey production to collapse. Starvation reduced resistance to disease among the Batak, and gastroenteritis decimated the infant population.

La Niña followed hard upon El Niño, and was felt until late April 1999 and again in 2000. The continuous rain prevented gatherers from drying lengths of rattan, which were damaged by fungus and thus unmarketable. Moreover, the rain stopped the Batak from burning more than small portions of their swiddens. The result was crop failure. To cope with the new food crisis, Batak became involved for the first time in alternative livelihood strategies such as the collection and sale of small trees to be used in charcoal-making (ten pieces were sold for P100 – less than US\$2).

### **The rise of mining in 2008**

Despite having ratified a range of international treaties – such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on Marine Dumping and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, as well as the recent UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – the Philippine government under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is calling for a revitalization of the mining industry that relegates environmental protection, the sustainable use of forest for NTFPs and other purposes, and indigenous peoples' rights to a position of secondary importance. As much as 30 per cent of the country's land area has already been opened to mining, and 2000 mining permit applications are pending nationwide (more than 300 in Palawan alone), some in core zones, protected areas, watershed areas, fertile agricultural land, NTFP extractive reserves, the ancestral domains of hundreds of indigenous communities and CBFMA areas. At present, the ancestral land of the Tanabag Batak is not directly threatened by mining operations because the local government of Puerto Princesa has banned mineral extraction in its territory. However, this might change after the next election.

This is a telling example of the way non-timber values, and the rights of indigenous peoples, are quickly discarded when powerful corporate interests arrive in forest areas. It also demonstrates the institutional confusion found in many governments, and the contradictory nature of policies and rules emanating from a single government agency. In this case, the DENR, the agency in charge of signing CBFMA's and

enforcing regulations for the protection of the environment, also approves mining applications. Resolving this conflict of interest requires clarification of the different roles played by the DENR, which one imagines should focus on its mandate to protect the Philippine environment and renewable natural resources, leaving other agencies such as the Department of Mines, Hydrocarbons and Geosciences to deal with the licensing of mining permits, ensuring compliance with the highest international technical standards (Doyle et al, 2007). This is particularly true since mining brings few benefits to local populations, or even the country as a whole, and results in hundreds of local communities being deprived of livelihoods based on farming, fishing and the collection and trade of NTFPs (Doyle et al, 2007).

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of key challenges to the effective implementation of NTFP policies in Palawan:

- 1 the impact of socioeconomic and environmental changes on 'sustainable' patterns of NTFP extraction;
- 2 poorly formulated government and NGO interventions that are intended to promote equity and sustainability in the NTFP trade, but fail to address the true livelihood needs of indigenous groups;
- 3 the lack of technical capacity within indigenous communities to comply with the legal and bureaucratic procedures governing the harvesting, transportation and sale of NTFPs;
- 4 the knock-on effect of the government ban on shifting cultivation, climate change and macroeconomic factors affecting both the availability and management of NTFPs; and
- 5 the threats posed by the new state policy calling for a revitalization of commercial mining.

Undoubtedly the combined effect of these factors suggests that a holistic, multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach is needed in order to harmonize NTFP policies with Batak livelihood needs and also incorporate managerial skill.

Historically, the combination of poorly conceived laws and policies with complex socio-political, economic and climatic factors has meant that the increasing involvement of Batak communities in the trade and harvesting of NTFPs has effectively further disempowered them. Ironically, while forest cover is decreasing at an alarming rate, Palawan Island continues to be publicized as the last green frontier of the Philippines. The Puerto Princesa City tourist brochure promises travellers 'a journey abounding with breathtaking scenarios, distinct sights, a rich cultural heritage, and the warmth of the people', and the motto now becoming popular among the 'greens' of Palawan is recited: 'Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time.' However, as a Batak leader told me, 'From the plane tourists can still look over the forest, but what they cannot see is that below the standing trees there are starving people'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based on fieldwork carried out while I was a visiting research associate at the Institute of Philippine Culture at the Ateneo de Manila University. A special thanks are owed to my Batak friends for their warm hospitality. I acknowledge invaluable funding (grant no. 7136) from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Urgent Anthropology grant of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 2007/08 and the Christensen Fund (grant no. 2007-03068).

## REFERENCES

- Asad, T. (1993) *Genealogies of Religions: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London
- Bech, J. (1997) Project evaluation: 'Sustainable utilization of non-timber forest products in Palawan', January–February, unpublished manuscript
- Bello, W. (2004) *The Anti-Development State: The Political Economy of Permanent Crisis in the Philippines*, Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines
- Bryant, R., Rigg, J. and Stott, P. (1993) 'Forest transformation and political ecology in South Asia', *Global Ecology and Biogeography Letters*, vol 3, pp101–111
- Cadelina, R. V. (1985) *In Time of Want and Plenty: The Batak Experience*, Silliman University Press, Dumaguete City, Philippines
- Callo, R. A. (1995) *Damage to Almaciga Resources in Puerto Princesa and Roxas, Palawan Concessions*, College, Laguna, Philippines, Report to Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Los Baños, Philippines
- Conelly, W. T. (1996) 'Strategies of indigenous resource use among the Tagbanua', in J. F. Eder and J. O. Fernandez (eds) *Palawan at the Crossroads: Development and the Environment on a Pine Frontier*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila, pp71–96
- Congress of the Philippines (1992) Republic Act 7611, Manila, Philippines
- Congress of the Philippines (1997) Republic Act 8371, Manila, Philippines
- Contreras, A. P. (2000) 'Rethinking participation and empowerment in the uplands', in J. Utting (ed) *Forest Policy and Politics in the Philippines: The dynamics of Participatory Conservation*, Ateneo de Manila University Press and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Manila, pp144–170
- Doyle, C., Wicks, C. and Nally, F. (2007) *Mining in the Philippines: Concerns and Conflicts*, SOAS, University of St Columban, Solihull, UK
- Eder, J. F. (1978) 'The caloric returns to food collecting: Disruption and change among the Batak of the Philippine tropical forest', *Human Ecology*, vol 6, pp55–69
- Eder, J. F. (1987) *On the Road to Tribal Extinction: Depopulation, Deculturation, and Maladaptation among the Batak of the Philippines*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA
- Foucault, M. (1982) 'The subject and power', in H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds) *Essays on the History and Theory of Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL
- Haribon-Palawan and IUCN (1996) *Sustainable Utilization of Non-Timber Forest Products*, Palawan Final Report, Palawan, Philippines

- Kirsch, S. (2001) 'Lost worlds: Environmental disaster, "culture loss", and the law', *Current Anthropology*, vol 42, no 2, pp167–198
- Novellino, D. (1999) 'The ominous switch: From indigenous forest management to conservation – the case of the Batak on Palawan Island, Philippines', in M. Colchester and C. Erni (eds) *Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas in South and Southeast Asia*, IWGIA Document No. 97, International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Copenhagen, pp250–295
- Novellino, D. (2000a) 'Recognition of ancestral domain claims on Palawan island, the Philippines: Is there a future?' in *Land Reform: Land Settlement and Cooperatives 2000/1*, Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome
- Novellino, D. (2000b) 'Forest conservation in Palawan', *Philippine Studies*, vol 48, pp347–372
- Novellino, D. (2003a) 'Miscommunication, seduction and confession: Managing local knowledge in participatory development', in J. Pottier, A. Bicker and P. Sillitoe (eds) *Negotiating Local Knowledge*, Pluto Press, London, pp273–297
- Novellino, D. (2003b) 'Contrasting landscapes, conflicting ontologies: Assessing environmental conservation on Palawan Island (the Philippines)', in D. Anderson and E. Berglund (eds) *Ethnographies of Conservation: Environmentalism and the Distribution of Privilege*, Berghahn, London, pp171–188
- Novellino, D. (2007a) "'Talking about kultura and signing contracts": The bureaucratization of the environment on Palawan Island (the Philippines)', in C. A. Maida (ed) *Sustainability and Communities of Place*, Berghahn, London and New York
- Novellino, D. (2007b) 'Cycles of politics and cycles of nature: Permanent crisis in the uplands of Palawan (the Philippines)', in R. Ellen (ed) *Modern Crises and Traditional Strategies: Local Ecological Knowledge in Island Southeast Asia*, Berghahn, London and New York, pp185–219
- Novellino, D. and Dressler, W. (2010) 'The role of "hybrid" NGOs in the conservation and development of Palawan Island, the Philippines', *Society and Natural Resources*, vol 23, no 2, pp165–180
- Platteau, J. P. (1995) 'A framework for the analysis of evolving patron-client ties in agrarian economies', *World Development*, vol 23, no 5, pp767–786
- Tandon, Y. (1996) 'An African perspective', in D. Sogge (ed) *Compassion and calculation: The business of private foreign aid*, Pluto Press with Transnational Institute, London/Chicago
- Wakker, E. (1993) *Towards Sustainable Production and Marketing of Non-Timber Forest Products in Palawan, The Philippines*, Tropical Social Forestry Consultancies, Haarlem, Netherlands