Licoy in Focus:
Achieving Self-Determined Development Through Sustainable Livelihoods

“Salamat unay daytoy nga tulong yo tapno dagiti problema iti Paracelis ket masungbatan. Makitak nga maysa daytoy nga wagas nga mangikkat ti kinapobre [iti umili] (We thank you very much for your help as this initiative will help solve the issues of poverty and under-development in Paracelis).”

Primo Dawagan, one of the elders in the Licoy community and an indirect beneficiary of the Inapinan Farmers Organization Incorporated (IFOI) whose members are composed of about 44 families belonging to the Licoy Indigenous peoples of Sitio Licoy, Poblacion, Paracelis, Mountain Province, Philippines, offered his thanks dur-
ing the 28 April 2022 project evaluation of their Muscovado Processing Center.

While IFOI members collectively expressed their gratitude for the support provided to them by various sponsors, they also shared how, as a community, they all voluntarily contributed to the construction of the building, especially in the manual ground levelling of the center’s grounds which, then, included rock boulder cutting, riprapping, backfilling, and general area clearing, among others. These efforts were freely done by all members, specifically in both the earlier and later stages of the project phase. The said ground levelling activity took the community 581 man-days to complete as the indicated location was part of a mountainous terrain covered by huge rock boulders and dense greenery.
Eventually, a Food-for-Work (FFW) arrangement was commenced through Tebtebba where members were offered minimal monetary compensation and food supply in exchange for their labor. It is worth-noting that members highlighted the fact that the said initiative became an opportunity for many of them to learn new skills including carpentry, masonry, and iron works or welding, among others.

“Datayo kuma ti mangi-share iti experiences tayo ta isu ti pagadalan tayo (Let us share our experiences as these will also serve as lessons learned for us),” encouraged Vicky Omanhan, auditor of IFOI, noting that there were several areas of work that needed improvement. She mentioned how they prioritized identifying and obtaining a parcel of land prior to construction instead of concentrating on training themselves toward better muscovado production, understanding that the skills necessary for production can be better learned through actual application.

“Adu latta ti ag-absent gapu ta agbirok da met ti pagsapulan para iti pamilya da ngem intultuloy mi latta ti trabaho; ag-meeting kami bago agtrabaho. Kada 4 PM inaldaw, agawid kami maggapo uma tapno maka-contribute kami iti panangipalpas daytoy processing center (Many would be absent during the construction of the processing building because they needed to find other job opportunities to help provide for their families but we continued the project, conducting a meeting prior to working. Every day at four in the afternoon, we would convene upon arriving from our swidden farms to contribute to the construction of the processing center),” emphasized Omanhan as she narrated the different challenges that the members experienced while building the center and, at the same time, funding the needs of their families.

Sugar cane processing is one of the main livelihood occupations of the Licoy people of Paracelis. This is a collective activity done in a makeshift work station
alongside their residences. Aside from muscovado, the raw sugar produced through evaporation and semi-solidification of sugar cane juice, other products from sugar cane processing—basi (sugar cane wine), vinegar, and sugar cane jelly, among others—enabled the community to engage more in the market and showed a potential of the sugar cane for more income generation. Thus, IFOI conceptualized the idea of a larger space and more appropriate housing ensuring safety, hygiene and efficiency for such a livelihood in 2018.

Throughout the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and despite the erratic weather conditions in the area, IFOI persevered in constructing their Muscovado Processing Center. Two bigger furnaces were also integrated to optimize heat and save fuel. The first cooking test using the new cooking furnaces recorded an hour being saved—the usual six hours spent to process six cans of sugar cane juice into muscovado became five hours.

Monetary resources, however, were insufficient, despite various contributions from the members themselves and donations given by different donors. The collected funds, originally estimated to cover all the expenses necessary for building completion, only turned out to cover the construction of the main parts of the eight-by-ten-meters processing center including its 12 columns, roof, concrete flooring, windows, and so forth.

Nonetheless, the necessity of fully enclosing the said building and the construction of additional cooking furnaces...
still call for support, a concern voiced out by Anthony “Aytuna” Dawagan, IFOI Chairman. “Ibag a ti agpayo ta anya ngay, awan met nga talaga ti maipearwaren iti tao (I need to be straightforward with you because we really do not have any more financial resources to cover the additional expenses needed),” he voiced out.

It took several days for the organization to prepare for the building’s inauguration ceremony. Male members of the organization harvested sugar cane from their gardens which were, then, pressed for its juice. A day prior to the launching of the processing center, both male and female members gathered to start muscovado production, producing more or less 22 kilos of muscovado, sugar cane jelly, and inakob (sugar cane jaggery).

The inauguration of the IFOI Muscovado Processing Center with the theme, “Pakosdoron tako da gagangay e mataguwan ta awad amburawan da ginanakan (Strengthen traditional economic livelihood for the benefit of the future generation),” took place on 2 May 2022. Alongside Tebtebba’s Philippine Program and Strategic Communications and Knowledge Management Department, other invitees included several officials of the barangay local government unit.

“Nagado nga ling-et met ti inted yo para daytoy nga banag, nagado nga sakripisyo. Maminsan pay ket haan kayon a makaapan idiy uma tapno laeng maaramid daytoy (building). Iti kinaado dagiti inaramid yo para daytoy nga processing center, makita yo met iti bendisyon nga inted iti Tebtebba, nga no ado met iti bendisyon yo, ada met iti maipaay yo ti daduma nga tao tapno maibingay tayo met kanyada. Agyaman tayo koma ta usaren tayo daytoy nga bendisyon tapno addan to diay tiyempo nga maibingay...
tayo met iti papada tayo nga annak ti Diyos (You shedded so much sweat doing this initiative; you made a lot of sacrifices for it. There were even instances when you would not attend to your swidden farms just so you could help construct this building. For all the things you did for this processing center, may you also acknowledge the blessings granted through Tebtebba and that you also get to share these blessings to others. Let us be grateful for these gifts and may we, in the future, use these to help others who are also God’s children),” highlighted Brother Rico Sumalag who officiated the Muscovado Processing Center’s inauguration blessing.

“Mabalin gayam nga maaramid ti development iti rural area. IFOI, dakayo iti prime mover na daytoy nga building—haan laeng nga tapno sublian tayo iti Indigenous products tayo nu di pati cultural practices tayo (This initiative is proof that development can happen in a rural area. IFOI, you are the prime mover of this building—not only to bring back pro-
duction of our Indigenous goods but also to strengthen our cultural practices),” noted Benjamin Gayudan, councilor of Barangay Poblacion, underpinning how such an initiative could be made possible even in a location as remote as Licoy, an area that, while part of Paracelis’ town center, is about six kilometers away and can only be reached by traversing mostly unpaved roads—and trails—by tricycle halfway and by either motorcycle (during summertime) or hiking the rest of the way.

Founded in 2015, IFOI was established through the guidance of the Diocese Social Action Council of the Vicariate of Bontoc-Lagawe, Northern Philippines that, then, linked the peoples’ organization with National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA)/Caritas Foundation Philippines, the advocacy, development, and humanitarian initiative of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in the country. Aimed at promoting community empowerment through sustainable agriculture, climate change mitigation and adaptation, community-based risk reduction, and agriculture-based livelihood development, muscovado production at Sitio Licoy started. With its vision to attain a sustainable livelihood while transferring Indigenous knowledge to the community’s future leaders, IFOI commenced the construction of its muscovado processing center in 2020 and plans to realize the said building’s completion as soon as additional resources become available.

The IFOI Muscovado Processing Center is an initiative done with support from the local government unit of the said barangay, NASSA/Caritas Foundation Philippines through Farm First and SwedBio through Tebtebba.

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