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Women Farmers in Africa Fight Impact of Climate Change

By Ronald Joshua

NEW YORK | BAMAKO (IDN) – Fatou Dembele is a farmer in landlocked Mali, where half of the population engaged in agriculture are women. Agriculture is a key sector to lift women out of poverty. But the increasing degradation of land and natural resources caused by climate change is making women more vulnerable.

Therefore when Dembele’s plants first started dying, she thought the plot of land was ruined, and her livelihood was at risk. “We thought the land was sick. We didn’t know that there were live parasites that attacked the roots of the plants and could kill them,” says Dembele.

The increased number of parasites, because of rising temperatures and humidity, is just one of the many side effects of climate change Dembele and other women farmers are faced with.

To combat the negative impact of climate change on women’s livelihoods, a new [UN Women](#) programme known as *Agriculture Femmes et Développement Durable* (AgriFed), implemented by the local non-governmental organization *Groupe d’Animation Action au Sahel* (GAAS) Mali, is helping local producers adapt to these new challenges.

The programme works with farmers to modernize their techniques, enables their access to information on latest advances in agriculture and increases the value of their products by improving their conservation methods.

“The effects of climate change are not sparing Mali, and are hitting this country hard, an additional challenge in an extremely fragile security context in the Sahel region,” Maxime Houinato, UN Women Country Representative in Mali, said at a side event co-organized by UN Women on March 14 at the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women ([CSW62](#)).

“And yet, Mali, although a low contributor to the global emission of greenhouse gases, is no less committed to the race to adapt to the effects of climate change,” she added.

To restore Dembele’s production, the programme taught her how to use locally available biopesticides to eliminate the parasites. “Thank goodness, we learned that there are local plants whose extracts can fight this disease,” says Dembele.

AgriFed started its activities in 2017 in the Segou region, over 200 kilometres northeast of Bamako, the capital of Mali. Training on sustainable agriculture techniques reached 247 women and 66 men. The training helped farmers improve water usage, crop scheduling, pesticide and fertilizer use, and cultivation techniques.

In the towns of Boidié and Sécoro, and Cercle de Tominan, women have improved and increased production of shallots thanks to the training. But during harvest, it

became clear that the women needed to learn how to conserve their produce better.

“We grow shallots and onions because of their long shelf-life, but we did not know conservation techniques [before],” explained Hayèrè Keita, a shallot producer and seller in Sécoro. “Following our traditional methods, the rates of loss can be very high.”

UN Women supported further training sessions that showed the farmers how to preserve products like shallots, onions and potatoes. Around 110 women producers have managed to increase their revenues using these modern production and preservation techniques.

“I have been growing vegetables and fruits for 20 years, but I only knew the traditional way of doing it,” says Alphonsine Dembele, another farmer.

“AgriFeD taught us to diversify the products we grow, with the introduction of the potatoes, tomatoes and peppers. They not only bring additional income, but also help improve nutrition at home and reduce malnourishment in our children. says Dembele, the other farmer.

She adds: “It has had a positive influence on social cohesion, because women [from different ethnic communities] now meet and have dialogues during the training sessions in the fields.”

The programme, funded by the Government of Luxembourg, will run for five years and is expected to be replicated in other areas of the country.

The programme was launched on December 12, 2017 with a view to building the resilience of a million women and youth in the Sahel to climate impacts through smart agriculture at the One Planet Summit. The launch coincided with a gathering of world leaders in the French capital to mark the anniversary of the landmark Paris Climate Change Agreement.

The One Planet Summit, co-hosted by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and the President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, aimed at supporting the formal UN process on climate action as nations look to raise climate ambition in the run up to 2020.

The initiative is a programme of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the G5 Secretariat. The G5 Sahel, the institutional framework for development coordination among the five countries in the region – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – has identified combatting climate change and environmental degradation, along with their effects on rural populations, as a priority.

At the national level, governments are working on adaptation strategies; the new initiative is designed to support those efforts. UN Women presented the programme, which is among some 12 showcased at the Summit, on behalf of the UN system. [IDN-InDepthNews – 27 March 2018]

Sustainable Livelihoods Behind Street Vending in Thailand

By Kalinga Seneviratne

KHAOSAN, Bangkok (IDN) – When people talk about sustainable development there is rarely any mention of the many street vendors who make a living on streets in Thailand, as across the rest of Asia. Even attempts to stop them doing business – like the unsuccessful year-long attempt by the governor of Bangkok to clean the city’s streets of street vendors – passes unnoticed in the media.

“Street vending tends to attract tourists to Bangkok, it is part of Thai lifestyle and tourists want to experience that,” says Pattama Vilailert, a tourism consultant. “Some tourists come to Thailand (especially) to taste reasonable street food.”

Vilailert notes that after visiting Bangkok, many Chinese tourists, for example, post photos of a street food stall on social media that go viral and others will then come to eat, take a photo and post it on the same social media. “It is part of their travel accomplishment,” she argues. Last year, a staggering 10 million Chinese visited Thailand.

In April last year, a month after Bangkok was named as the finest street food destination in the world by CNN, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) announced that it was going to rid Bangkok’s pavements of street vendors in the interest of cleanliness, safety and order.

Wanlop Suwandee, chief adviser to Bangkok’s governor, said then that “street vendors have seized the pavement space for too long and we already provide them with space to sell food and other products legally in the market, so there will be no let-up in this operation.”

In June last year, representatives of street vendors from Bangkok’s 50 districts submitted a letter to Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha asking that they be allowed to continue trading on the streets because it was their livelihood. It was reported by the *Nation* news group that the vendors described the measures by the government and the BMA to confine Bangkok’s street vendors to designated areas and markets as too harsh.

One of the areas that was exempt from the ban was the backpacker tourist haven of Khaosan, a historic area bordering the Chayo Prayo river. For decades this area has been a magnet for budget travellers with its cheap hostels and guesthouses ... and street vendors.

Today, not only Westerners but also thousands of Asian travellers are attracted to its street vending culture, creating a carnival-like atmosphere after sunset, with streets lined by the folding tables and chairs of food stalls, virtually closing thoroughfare to traffic. Besides the many neighbourhood hotels and pubs that also set out their own folding tables and chairs on the street, numerous ‘tent’ stalls are put up on the pavements selling objects like clothes, shoes, bags and souvenirs, among others.

Over the years, studies have shown that street vending is a major livelihood for many Thais with a low level of education and it has thus become a major source of income for urban poor families, some of which have migrated from the villages.

Here in Khaosan, vendors are said to pay monthly fees to someone, be it rent to the land or shop owner where they sell their food, bribes to police or fees to informal neighbourhood organisations.

However, Nut, a food vendor in her 40s who has been selling noodles from her mobile cart here for many years, told IDN that mobile stalls do not pay the police. "If I have a stationary shop I have to pay" she told IDN, adding, "I have a family in Bangkok to feed from what I earn from this." But, a juice seller who gave his name as Tot complained, "I have to pay money every day to do business. No money, police arrest me. They come every day to take money."

One of the street food vendors, whom one of his Burmese employees told IDN is a Cambodian, said that he runs his stall 24 hours a day. "I supervise at night. My sister comes in the morning," he explained, refusing to give his name. He was not willing to say if he has to pay the police but he did indicate that he has to pay "someone" to operate here.

He employs about eight young workers – men and women – from Myanmar. He has his kitchen and the tables and chairs for his customers under five tents. All of these are taken out and stored in the back of a pick-up truck on Monday morning and brought back out on Tuesday evening, because street stalls are not allowed to operate on Mondays.

Casually talking to street vendors, IDN noted that most of the vendors who sell non-food items like clothes, shoes and bags are from Myanmar, some of Nepali origin. Most seem to be in their 20s and 30s. They were unwilling to give their names. A Burmese woman in her 30s selling bags said that her "boss" pays her 350 Bhat (about 10 dollars) a day plus a two percent commission on every 1,000 Bhat of sales.

A 28-year-old man who gave his name as Kumar said that he is of Nepali origin but a Myanmar citizen from Mandalay. "We come getting the passport chopped (at the border) and work here. We're legally here," he insisted. "No jobs in Mandalay. We cannot starve there. I get about 15,000 Bhat (about 425 dollars) a month from boss. This is not my shop. Boss pay the police for me to have shop here ... not me."

In January it was reported that the Thai authorities had arrested over 1,600 illegal migrants, mainly from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos who were working as street vendors or in restaurants. Under a new law, they could be sentenced to five years in prison or fined up to 100,000 Bhat (about 2,800 dollars), and employers of illegal migrants also face hefty fines.

A Thai social worker, who has worked with Myanmar refugees for over two decades, but did not want to be named, told IDN that there are about four million Myanmar people working in Thailand and only about 200,000 have legal status to

work here. “They pay agents in border areas to get work permits ... Thai brokers makes thousands of Bhat from each of them,” she explained.

“As long as they can speak Thai they are tolerated and Thais don’t care” she added. “These migrants come from a culture where almost everything is done illegally so they don’t see anything wrong in getting things done by paying someone.”

She did not see a problem for the Thai street vendors (who usually operate food stalls) in terms of sustainable incomes for themselves from street trading.

In fact, she noted, these migrant workers may contribute towards making street vending more profitable and sustainable for the locals because “undocumented migrants can’t go for higher paid jobs ... so they would work for bosses to run their street shops or work as kitchen hands.” [IDN-InDepthNews – 15 February 2018]

‘Smart Farms’ Making Thai Agriculture Sufficient and Sustainable

By Kalinga Seneviratne

CHANTHABURI, Thailand (IDN) – Thai farmers are going back to basics under a “Smart Farms” formula supported by modern information communication technology (ICT) integrated into a Buddhist concept of ‘sufficiency economy’ to make the kingdom’s lifeblood – agriculture and its small-scale farmers – sustainable into the foreseeable future.

“Some farmers use chemical fertiliser to get more fruits [from their trees] (but) their trunks die in three to five years. We use organic fertiliser here and our trunks will last for 30 years” said farmer Sittipong Yanaso, speaking to IDN at his lush multi-cropping durian plantation here.

“We get enough dry leaves for our fertiliser,” he added, pointing to the green mountains surrounding his plantation. Showing the banana plants growing in between his durian trees, he explained that the trunks are used after harvesting the fruits, a technique that has been handed down from ancestors.

Sittipong’s durian plantation also has banana, papaya, rabuttan, mangostean, pepper, coconut and longon plants, which serve to give him an income in between his durian harvests. Recently he has planted some coffee and has a small area of rubber trees that adds to his income. He has also planted bamboo as wind-breakers and the tall bamboo tree trunks provide him material as support for banana trees (when fruits bloom) as well as for picking fruits.

“This is a very mindful orchard,” argues Professor Kamolrat Intaratat, Director of the Centre of Communication and Development Knowledge Management (CCDKM), whose organisation has assisted Sittipong in adopting ICTs to improve his knowledge of organic farming and marketing.

“The philosophy of CCDKM is that we work with conceptual base integration and a partnership model, working with marginal people,” explained Kamolrat, after accompanying IDN on a tour of the farm. “Most important is to create income generating projects... the majority of Thais are small farmers, so we look at how to use ICT to facilitate smart farming in Thailand.”

Kamolrat went on to explain that farmers are trained in ICT literacy and how to access information. “After that we train how to analyse this information (to know) the price of the farm product, and they gain access to many farm pricing [models] ... from the government, private and export markets. Farmers can then decide what is the best price for them to sell the product.”

“We show how ICTs can be used with the organic ecological farming systems ... Smart farming is not only about ICTs, but also mindset and innovative processes in managing their farms.”

At the end of 2015, around 35 percent of the Thai workforce was engaged in agriculture, mainly as small-scale rural farmers. To safeguard Thailand’s rural

farmers and make their livelihood sustainable, the Thai government has introduced many programmes in recent years under the philosophy of 'sufficiency economics', which was first mooted by the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1998, when the kingdom faced a grave economic crisis.

Drawing on Thailand's deep Buddhist tradition, this concept emphasises the 'middle way' – the importance of balance. Both sustainability and sufficiency are at the core of this philosophy, with human development as its principle aim. Sharing (knowledge and resources) rather than competition and exploitation are important aspects of this system.

The Thai government has thus been promoting the formation of area-specific farmers' cooperatives using notions similar to the 'risk management' and 'stakeholder' philosophy in Western economics which came into prominence in the 1990s.

To improve the livelihood sustainability of the rural sector, the Thai government has laid out a number of measures under this philosophy, such as loans through village funds and village development programmes for the improvement of people's livelihood through Pracharat grassroots projects.

One of the campaigns under the Pracharat ("state of the people") approach is a scheme developed with Kasetsart University and the Thai Chamber of Commerce to develop the "Thai GAP" standard, which is a system for fruit and vegetable safety according to good agricultural practices (GAP), which takes into consideration the quality of land management, soil, seedlings, water management, fertilising, pest management, consumer safety and environmental protection.

Once certified by Thai GAP, producers will receive their own QR Code so that smartphone users (consumers) can find information about the product. This initiative is a way of uplifting the farming sector into the digital era where consumers who want healthy products can reach farmers directly.

CCDKM has been working with 'Smart Farmers' to gain this GAP certification and Sittipong's farm is one of those that have achieved this status. "For most of the GAP (certified) farmers, their produce is not enough for the demand because people are now very concerned about their health," said Kamolrat. However, "durian and banana in this farm have pre-orders ... right now the durian orchard is already booked three months in advance."

"Our farm is very self-sufficient. Right now the demand is so much we can't satisfy all," confirms Sittipong's wife Narisara. She explained that the farm's sufficiency is achieved through maximising family labour that includes her daughter and son-in-law.

"We don't use outside labour. We plan our farm well," she added, showing her banana plantations where "we get a regular income (in between durian harvests) because we space out planting."

She also added that the use of ICTs has helped the family to market its produce profitably and obtain a higher price for its fruits, especially supermarkets buying its

bananas at a premium price “given that GAP certification indicates it is export quality.”

Sittipong told IDN that he is able to keep his income from the durain harvest “in the bank” because he obtains a substantial income from others crops such as banana, pepper and coconut spread throughout the year.

Sittipong has now become an e-agriculture evangelist in the region, converting other farmers to the sufficiency and sustainable philosophy of organic farming. He points out that even if you buy fertiliser from outside, organic fertiliser costs one-third of its chemical counterpart, so that when other farmers visit his farm and observe his comfortable lifestyle, it is not difficult to be converted.

“This is a pilot farm to tell others that even if you have a husband and wife team, you can do your own farm,” said Kamolrat. “What is important is to plan your crop all the time.”

Meanwhile, the Thai government has begun to spread its sufficiency economics development philosophy overseas. When Thailand took the chair of the Group of 77 developing countries in January 2016, Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai told member states that the ‘sufficiency economics’ model on holistic farm management could be adopted by most of them to achieve all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

He pointed out that this philosophy is at the core of SDG 12 which calls for reasonable consumption and production, and its ability to provide food security aligns well with SDG 1 on eliminating poverty and SDG 2 on eliminating hunger. [IDN-InDepthNews – 28 January 2018]

Thai Doctor Creating Multi-Faceted Approach to Sustainable Development

By Kalinga Seneviratne

CHANTABURI, Thailand (IDN) – A passionate, socially conscious doctor in this rural farming community in the north-east of Thailand is working with a school for marginalised children, supported by a foundation set up by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the second daughter of late King Bhumibol who died in October 2016.

The school aims at empowering the students to break into the medical field through an unconventional career path that is providing a multi-faceted approach to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)).

After a demonstration at the school by his students of a unique Thai massage therapy he has developed to treat what is called ‘office syndrome’ (problems of the neck and shoulder due to long exposure to working in front of a computer screen), Dr Poonchai Chitanuntavitaya, Chief Medical Officer of Social Health Enterprise told IDN: “I have here six Hmong (hill tribe) students and their families are very happy. If they stay there (in the hills) they will be just workers in the corn field but here they can gain knowledge, gain self-esteem and they could one day become health professionals.”

“Once I get training, I get more opportunities to get a job,” one of his students 17-year-old Natetaya Janelinda told IDN. “Along the way I can help others who are sick,” adding that one day she would like to become a doctor.

Professor Kamolrat Intaratat, consultant to the Smart Schools programme and Director of the Centre of Communication and Development Knowledge Management ([CCDKM](#)), who was listening to the interview, said: “I’m surprised she said she wants to be a doctor. Normally marginalised kids don’t dare say that. This programme has given her self-confidence.”

Merging Thai massage wisdom with modern knowledge

Explaining his unique version of Thai massage, Dr Poonchai says that it is about merging the ancient Thai wisdom of massage with modern medical knowledge, especially that which is related to cardiology, given that he is a trained heart specialist.

“I have treated many heart patients and I know work tension leads them to hypertension, high cholesterol, no exercise and ultimately heart attacks,” he argues, but “more and more I realise it’s not the right process to treat a patient, the best is prevention.”

For this reason, he studied the physiology of the body and found that it is the muscles that makes people stressed and create the adenine rush of the body to fatigue. “All that can be reversed by stretching, and pinpointing (massage) on some pain points in your body, then the brain will be reversed to order,” he says.

“It’s like, if you are a well trained meditator, you can make the whole body be relaxed during meditations ... but not many people can do that. So I have devised this therapy to mimic the effect of that, to release your tense muscle to relax. We call it the human maintenance service.”

Giving disadvantaged children a new chance

In training his youthful practitioners, he has to convey this medical knowledge gradually to his pupils. But, more importantly he also needs strong, fit youngsters to perform this practice. “I need about a month to build up their core muscles. They do various types of exercises. I wake them at 5 am because they are in boarding school, I can have exercise for 1 hour in the morning and in the evening we start training at 5 and finish at 8,” explains Dr Poonchai.

People come to the school on Saturdays and Sundays to act as models for the students to practise the skill they are learning. Sometimes they also go to the local market to provide the service. Recently, at a nine-day Red Cross festival in town, he provided 20 of his students to offer the massage.

Rajaprajanugroh 48, the school where these pupils study, has 548 students and is a 100 percent boarding school because the children – who study from primary 1 to senior high school level – come from disadvantaged backgrounds, many have no parents, some have been drug-addicted or addicted to electronic games, some even being in child prostitution and 80 percent of them come from homeless families.

Princess Sirindhorn’s foundation has created and funds 85 of similar schools across Thailand to educate marginalised children in using modern ICTs in order to create sustainable income generation futures for themselves.

Two-track education

Kamolrat explains that the foundation’s policy has opened up the educational system for marginalised children to travel on two tracks. “The first is vocational training because many, once they finish senior high school, don’t get the chance to go to university because they go to do a job. The Princess wants them to learn ICT skills for becoming smart entrepreneurs ... the second is for some to proceed on to a university education.”

According to Kamolrat, “the first step of ICT training is simple e-commerce, knowing that they can use ICT for taking the product to market ... from packaging to PR to advertising. Do e-marketing themselves. Check stock, update catalogue, as well as do e-banking. How to transfer money using internet”.

Dr Poonchai’s programme is a new innovation for the idea of the Smart School – a technology-based teaching learning institution to prepare children for the Information Age – notes Kamolrat.

“Thais are good in massage, it comes from our ancestors ... this doctor is trying to integrate medical knowledge into indigenous knowledge, train youth in this kind of massage. It is to be academically and professionally trained ... when they gain

experience from a young age they can become professional massager, and the sustainability of this is in no doubt,” she argues.

Adding a new dimension to the Smart School concept

The school’s director, Dr Supaporn Papakdee, agrees that this massage training has added a new dimension to the Smart School programme here. “We were lucky to get the services of a medical doctor who saw the potential of our students,” she told IDN. “They get training with medical backup, they can get income immediately for themselves and their family. Hopeless kids have become income earners . . . their families are proud.”

“I normally did not have self-confidence (but) now by helping others I have,” said another 17-year-old trainee Thidarat Singthong. “I would like to be a nurse in the navy,” she added.

Dr Poonchai says that what he is introducing to his students is a mobile model of income generation where they can go to the people by, for example, setting up shop at a city rail station or at local airports where the treatment could be given in 10 minutes. In an eight-hour shift they could treat up to 40 people in a day, which would generate a substantial income.

“Office syndrome is a global problem and I hope one day we can provide professional therapists to the UN Development Programme (UNDP),” he said with a determined smile.

Describing himself as a “poor doctor”, Dr Poonchai says that he is not doing this to become rich but he would like to use future income generated by his project to fix the ecological disaster facing Thailand, in the very communities these young people come from.

“I will bring a member of a family of corn farmers who burn the land to farm, to work with me (as massage therapist) and when they have the money they will stop burning the forest and the new forest will have higher value and be less toxic,” the doctor argues, perhaps introducing a new multi-faceted approach to sustainable development. [IDN-InDepthNews – 19 January 2018]

Tanzania Pushing Gender Empowerment Despite Hurdles

By Kizito Makoye

DAR ES SALAAM (IDN) – Despite efforts to promote gender equality, women and girls in Tanzania are still marginalised and largely under-utilised citizens – often suffering from discrimination and violence from their male counterparts due to a biased male-dominated system which often pushes women to the brink of survival.

However, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), various initiatives are being implemented to empower women, although they still face obstacles that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Among others, the SDGs call for women's empowerment, greater access to education, health care, decent work and fair representation in political and economic decision-making processes, and the following are just some of the initiatives in these directions currently under way in the East African country.

Rita Robert was 16 when she was raped, became pregnant and subsequently kicked out of school, crushing her dreams of becoming a lawyer. "I was a hard-working student but all my dreams had been shattered," said Rita, now 19. The former student of Inyonga Secondary School in Katavi region in south-western Tanzania is one of many girls expelled from school after falling pregnant.

In June 2017, President John Magufuli had faced criticism when he said girls who become mothers would not be allowed back in school.

Katavi region has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the country, with 45 percent of girls aged 15-19 becoming pregnant, according to 2016 data from Tanzania's National Bureau of Statistics.

However, as part of its nationwide campaign to fight gender violence, the Tanzanian government is now setting up "Defence and Security" desks in public schools to protect adolescent girls from pregnancy.

Two or more teachers are being picked in each school to handle sexual abuse cases and report them to the relevant authorities, the government said.

According to Ummy Mwalimu, Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children, the selected teachers will be trained and equipped with knowledge and the skills needed to relay accurate and useful information on various sexual and reproductive health issues and help girls avoid sex predators. "All schools should have these desks which will be manned by teachers capable of handling gender violence issues," she said.

According to rights campaigners, a culture of silence, outdated cultural practices, lack of reproductive health education and distance to school, are some of the factors fuelling teen pregnancies in Tanzania.

Female students are often exposed to widespread sexual harassment or, in some schools, male teachers coerce them into sexual relationships. Officials rarely

report sexual abuse to police, and many schools lack a confidential reporting mechanism, a 2016 Human Rights Watch report showed.

However, the government hopes that the new initiative will help reduce the number of girls who fall pregnant and drop out of school. The plan is to expose them to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education covering puberty, gender identity, sexual abuse, pregnancy and risky sexual behaviour, according to officials.

While underage sex is criminalised in Tanzania, poor parents often marry off their daughters using a special dispensation granted by the 1971 marriage law, which allows a girl as young as 15 years to marry with parental or court consent.

Referring to the government's initiative, Faiza Jama Mohamed, Africa Director of Equality Now, said: "This is a welcome move ... nevertheless, the government needs to focus on arresting and holding sex predators to account instead of its emphasis on 'protect girls against temptation'."

In an effort to bridge the gender divide by breaking male dominance in corporate management, the Association of Tanzania Employers (ATE) is training women executives with a view to propelling them to take senior leadership positions.

Companies with strong female leadership deliver a higher return on equity compared with those without women at the most senior levels, according to a recent MSCI World Index survey. In Tanzania, women hold only 35 percent of all senior leadership positions.

Under the initiative, called [Female Future](#), women in corporate firms are being mentored to acquire leadership skills which will help them climb to key decision-making positions while inspiring and challenging them to work harder and deliver on set organizational goals.

Lilian Machera, coordinator of Female Future Programme, said the programme aims to increase women's capacities in the workplace so that they become more competent leaders capable of making important corporate decisions.

"Our main focus is to enable employers to have an effective business environment and risk management at the helm," she told IDN. "We develop ladies to become more potential leaders capable of overcoming fear and managing fright when negotiating in various issue for their organizations."

According to Machera, by involving employees in this programme, their companies will be able to develop non-gender based leadership at the top to increase effectiveness and risk management through developing and implementing growth strategies.

Under the initiative, which started in 2015 and is jointly implemented with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises ([NHO](#)), several women leaders from different corporate organisations are being exposed to business development practices and also introduced to the concept of leadership and board competence.

Juliana Swai, one of the course participants who works as General Manager (Operations) with Akiba Commercial Bank, said that through the initiative she has made a significant shift in her professional life and is now “a better person and a better leader”.

"Female Future has created a total mindset shift in me, I look at things from another angle, with curiosity, compassion and objectiveness that was not always present in the past," she said.

In the bustling Mchikichini market in Dar es Salaam, female traders have always battled abuse and humiliation from their male counterparts because of their gender.

But ever since Equality for Growth (EfG) – a Tanzania-based non-profit organisation – launched its awareness campaign seeking to empower women in the informal sector to enable them to increase their incomes and reduce household poverty, their confidence has improved remarkably.

Women working in the informal sector in Tanzania often experience violence as they go about their daily business. The informal and unregulated nature of their working environment is worsened by the absence of a mechanism for reporting violence.

A 2009 survey by EfG showed alarming levels of violence experienced by women market traders. According to the survey, 40 percent of women traders in Dar es Salaam markets had been sexually harassed, 32 percent verbally abused and 24 percent had experienced other forms of violence from male traders and customers.

To curb such a situation, EfG is training female market traders to understand how to fight for their rights as well as putting a mechanism in place whereby market traders work without fear of violence and are protected by the law.

Dubbed "Mpe riziki si matusi" – Swahili for “Sustain her with income not abuse”, the UN women-funded initiative rolled out in market places across Dar es Salaam has helped reduce gender-based violence, officials said.

According to EfG programme officer Shaaban Rulimbiye, the programme which started in 2015 has transformed the lives of hundreds of female traders in Tanzania’s largest city, making the market safer and enabling them to enjoy their economic rights in a safe environment free from violence.

“We have also trained female vendors to become legal community supporters so that they can raise awareness about violence against women,” he said.

Aisha Shaaban, a female trader at Ilala market in Dar es Salaam, said the training has helped her understand her rights and how to report men who try to violate her rights. “I now know how to report anyone who uses abusive language or attempts to sexually abuse me. No one tries to abuse me these days.”

According to Rulimbiye, EfG has trained several legal community supporters who assist women to report cases of abuse in the markets. The project has also created guidelines which bring together various community stakeholders – including the police, market officials and vendors – to discuss issues of common interest. “The perpetrators of gender violence are being fined and women work freely without the fear of being sexually harassed,” Rulimbiye said

Jane Magigita, EfG Executive Director, said the organisation hopes to see the informal sector in Tanzania free of all forms of gender-based violence.

“This project not only supports women’s rights to live a life free of violence but also empower them economically. A safer market means more women can do business safely,” she added.

Faiza Omar lost all hopes when she failed her final exams. However, these were rekindled when she returned to school after she had received advice to re-sit her exam. With the support of her teachers and parents, she resumed classes with confidence and subsequently passed her exams, thanks to the ‘Room to Read’ education programme for girls – an initiative seeking to support girls to complete secondary school education and also learn relevant life skills. “I would not have finished my studies had I not received encouragement from the teachers,” said Faiza.

While Tanzania has made significant progress overall in primary school enrolment, few girls, especially in rural areas, complete their secondary education because of early marriage, teenage pregnancy and poverty, women’s rights groups say.

In Tanzania, 76 percent of girls often drop out of secondary school due to pregnancy and early marriages. Under the initiative, girls are introduced to life skills education, child rights, mentoring and gender response. The ‘Room to Read’ programme collaborates with local governments, schools, communities and families to ensure that they understand the importance of literacy and how they can play a role in enabling the girl child to reach her full potential.

According to Jamila Mrisho, a social mobiliser and focal teacher at Kiromo Secondary School, said the programme has played a central role in helping girls to remain in school.

“When a girl is at the highest risk of dropping out, we talk to them and advise parents to take necessary actions so that their daughters remain in school,” she said, adding that the programme aims to help girls from poor families to access career and leadership coaching, reproductive health studies and life skills.

In Mlingotini village, where Faiza lives, women find it increasingly difficult to support themselves and their families due to scarcity of water and they generally lack awareness and motivation regarding education, creating an obstacle for girls who want to learn.

Under the ‘Room to Read’ programme, girls interact with teachers or instructors who act as the focal persons for organising various life skills, mentoring and gender response activities. [IDN-InDepthNews – 16 January 2018]

Sustainability Is Developing Community From Within

By Kalinga Seneviratne

NAMOKANDA, West Bengal, India (IDN) – Six years ago this remote village of 130 households about 80 km from Santiniketan – the hometown of famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore – was a small picturesque village community surrounded by paddy fields, but without a sustainable development concept.

Today it is a confident community with most households having access to water and sanitation, and most of its children in school aspiring to go to university. One of the community leaders is even doing research in development communication at the famous [Visva-Bharati University](#), India's first 'institute of national importance', set up by Tagore.

The remarkable transformation of the village community has taken place thanks to a concept of 'Developing Community From Within' (DCFW) introduced by the Centre for Journalism and Mass Communication ([CJMC](#)) at Visva-Bharati University in 2011, led by its project director Professor Biplab Loho Chowdhury and assisted by the Delhi-based Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation (GRTF).

"Communication for development needs to have certain values which are often absent in mass media-based communication strategy and action," argues Chowdhury, who developed the concept of 'community communication spectrum'. "We need to use the communities' own communication strategies to motivate them to act."

He believes that development communication has largely failed in India because Indian scholars have mainly borrowed from the western Aristotelian model to support target-driven capital-intensive outside-driven development.

According to Chowdhury, it is now time to look closely at the trans-generational communication systems developed starting from the Vedic period that has filtered down through the centuries and is still practised at village level.

Thus, localism need to be considered "as a value in communication to ensure that the local development process utilises local mores, folkways, folk talents and practices as channels and part of the message", thus ensuring spontaneous village participation and cost-minimising. This is the strategy that CJMC has adopted in working with the community here.

In 2011, Chowdhury and a group of his students spent many days in the community, meeting members to find out their needs and perception about own resources. They found three main problems – lack of knowledge on health issues, lack of community organisation and apathy of government agencies in assisting the community.

However, when a doctor was asked to come in and check on the health conditions of the community, he found its members to be in good health. Thus, the

community was encouraged to maintain its good health standards and a workshop was organised on good parenting for better progeny.

In order to improve the developmental organisation structure of the village and take forward educational programmes, 'Namokanda Prochesta' (NP) – meaning Namokanda Effort – was formed, made up of members of the community who were mainly teachers working in schools in the area.

“From grade 1 to 12 every student needs to be under the ambit of the NP programme,” explains Chowdhury. “(Thus) every student gets training in proper social and family behaviour” and the clean, healthy and confident community to be found here is a result of this project.

NP has been giving free tuition for students and offering annual scholarships. The 'helping from within' concept has encouraged villagers to share each other's vegetable harvests and special food preparations.

“Here the youth groups with the help of community elders undertake village development projects,” explains community coordinator Srimantha Mandal, who is a CJMC graduate and a primary school teacher by own choice. “With the help of Visva-Bharati and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore Foundation, we are learning to make progress from within ourselves utilising local resources”.

The community has also set up a 'Shishu Panchayat' (SP) consisting of school-going children with its own chief minister and a Cabinet of ministers to promote the ethos of active citizenship in them.

The DCFW concept has a strong cultural component, where the community's traditional culture and artistic expressions are encouraged. This is in line with Tagore's philosophy of a strong community having a strong indigenous traditional culture.

With the help of students from CJMC, the young members of SP have just produced their own newspaper with articles, poetry, cartoons and other cultural expressions. Their chief minister Rituparna Mandal is an accomplished singer.

“My role is to solve problems for our youth,” she told IDN. “I look after the information, culture and ecology of the village,” added the confident 14 year old. She related a novel way of overcoming a gender barrier in the community through acting within the ambit of the SP. “We had a problem with our community because our families don't want us to play with the boys, (so) we found a land outside the village where girls play together”.

“We girls can play a lot of sports now,” added Pooja Mandal, sports minister of SP. “If any child wants to play and doesn't know how to, we guide her (be it) football, volleyball, badminton, gymnastic, (and even) yoga.”

The SP meets about once a month when there is no academic pressure on them. “They take on ideas for the community to move. They are the eye keepers of the community – the alert leaders,” says Srimantha Mandal.

Chowdhury says that this community does not accept any fund from outside to implement community-initiated development programmes because that model is not sustainable. What it obtains is ideas and guidance.

One example he pointed out to IDN is how the community had to spend over 30,000 rupees (470 dollars) every year to repair the road to the village after the rainy season. Now they have learned how to carry out studies and prepare documents for advocacy to the government for projects which require huge funding. They have prepared a document to ask for government funds to bank the adjoining Dwarka river so that the houses and lands by the riverside can be saved from erosion during the next rainy season.

“Social media is not much liked (by these communities) because the human touch is not there,” explains Chowdhury. “The human touch is very basic to them and they have strong group communication traditions (that are utilised) ... it is mouth-to-mouth”. Through these communication strategies (armed with knowledge) they are now able to communicate confidently with government agencies and the outside media.

“The efforts of the people of Namokanda portrays that changes can be effected with immense dedication and the belief of 'oneness',” noted Bakul Chandra Roy, a student from Bangladesh at CJMC, who was part of the team visiting the community. He was one of the first four interns to stay in the village last summer, and the villagers gave them the best hospitality.

This is not the first of its kind in India. Chowdhury introduced his concept to three other villages in Assam in north-east India in 1998 to test the strength of DCFW for advancing communities into the path of sustainable development.

“The communication process must make communities realise their relevance, interdependence and interaction with the macro society. The communicator provides the frame of reference for the people. His or her personality gives the process a personality advantage. This is the stabilising value of communication,” argues Chowdhury. [IDN-InDepthNews – 12 January 2018]

Village Buddhist Monks in Laos Initiate Environmentally-Aware Development

By Toung Eh Synuanchanh

BEUNGSANTHUENG, Laos (IDN) – A quiet revolution is taking shape in rural Laos, where environmentally-conscious village Buddhist monks are teaching people morality and meditation to spearhead a movement mobilising the people to economically develop their communities for living in harmony with nature rather than destroying it in the name of development.

At the Ban Beungsanthueng community, in Nongbok District in Khammouane Province of Laos, about 400 km south of the capital Vientiane, monks educate the villagers in *Sila* (Buddhist morality) and the way to live a good life (Right Livelihood), while protecting the environment. In this nominally communist country, the monks explain the linkage between humans and nature to villagers, and its importance to their livelihoods and well-being.

“Inviting the villager to practise meditation and observe five or eight precepts is the process of preparing their mind before initiating any activities ... awakens them to realising the impact of their activities or practice on the environment and also the impacts on their daily lives and well-being,” explains Phra Phithak Somphong of the local village temple here.

Phra Phithak is one of the monks who had been trained by the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organisation (LBFO) for the purpose of engaging in grassroots development work. The monk started the work soon after completing his training in Vientiane in 2013 and began by inviting villagers to observe Buddhist precepts and practise *vipassana* (mindful) meditation every full moon (holy) day. He inculcates Buddhist morality in the villagers, including children and youth. The monk points out that this practice follows the Buddha style of teaching or training (*Buddha witheenaikarnsone*).

Meanwhile, he has formed a villagers’ Buddhist Volunteer Spirit for Community group with children, youth and adults included in the group. Activities include cleaning the village access road, road reparations, production of compost or non-chemical fertiliser for agriculture, pilot organic gardening, reforestation, conservation and ecological protection.

Over the centuries, Buddhism has been linked with development in Laos. Buddhism was introduced to the country and promoted in the era of King Fangum Maharaja in the 14th century, when the Lao Lanxang Kingdom (Kingdom of the Million Elephants) was united. Since then, Buddhist temples have played a vital role as education centres (temple schools or *hong hien wat*) and Buddhist monks have continued to play an educational role up to today.

Furthermore, Buddhist monks in Laos significantly supported the process of gaining and declaring the independence of Laos from France and also the founding of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). They helped to impart spirituality and arouse people to join the process of fighting for Lao independence.

After the founding of Lao PDR on December 2, 1975 at the end of the Indo-China war, the role of Buddhist monks in development appeared to diminish. But, Buddhist values remained embedded in Lao people's lifestyle, tradition and culture, and monks continued to play their educator's role.

Monks have understood their role to stay at their temples to learn and practise Dhamma (Buddhist teachings) and disciplines, accept the invitation of lay people for religious activities (rituals) in order to relieve spiritual sufferings and accept offerings to meet their basic needs, such as clothing, food, accommodation and medicines. This community role makes a psychological impact on people's minds, and encourages people to pursue and cultivate Buddhist practices like loving-kindness, compassion and mindfulness which promote social harmony and peace.

Nevertheless, this alone cannot respond to the rapid changes and social context that affects people's mind and their well-being. Therefore, the Sangha (Buddhist order of monks) in Laos had to rethink their roles. They realised that it was their duty to become involved in the development process in order to help Lao people obviate their sufferings. From a Buddhist point of view, social issues that affect people's well-being are considered as sufferings.

Degradation of the environment is one reason for this suffering, and monks and villagers have agreed that they will use the sacred forest, the great ancestor's spirit dwelling villagers call "Don Hor", as an area for protection and conservation.

Due to the fact that people in the village believe in Buddhism along with their ancestor spirit, monks and villagers began by negotiating their needs and intentions with the ancestor spirit or "Pu Ta Yaphaw" through the persons who act as mediums known as "Jum Ban" and "Nang Thiem" (the Sharman). These people play a vital spiritual role in the village in communicating with the Pu Ta.

"The monks and villagers came to me and asked me to communicate with the Pu Ta to ask for his permission to take his area - Don Hor - for reforestation activities and as a protected and conservation area," explains the village Jum Ban. "The Pu Ta gave them permission and allowed them to plant trees whenever they want. On the day of demarcation, the Pu Ta borrowed and possessed my body and he then pointed to where the monks and villagers could put posts to demarcate the area."

This is how tradition and modern environmentalism merge. Soon after obtaining permission from the Pu Ta, they began demarcation and held an ordination ritual to ordain the area according to Buddhist ritual in order to protect the forest in the area. **"The reason why we have to protect the land and forest (is) because people are greedy. They do not care about collective or community property; they will seize it if they see their benefits. This initiative will help to prevent the protected area, trees and animals in the area from encroachment, cutting and hunting,"** argues Phra Phithak. **"Nature is linked to people's well-being. If we achieve this, it will become a source of food that can be collected all year round, and producing oxygen or fresh air for us to breathe,"** he adds. **This follows the Buddhist worldview that all creatures on earth are linked: the human being is also a part of nature, earns a living with nature, and survives because of nature. [IDN-InDepthNews – 07 December 2017]**

Traditional Knowledge and Education Major Themes at Arctic Circle Assembly

By Lowana Veal

REYKJAVIK (IDN) – “Islanders have nothing to do with climate change though they may suffer the most,” Nainoa Thompson from the Polynesian Voyaging Society told an Arctic Circle seminar focusing on global perspectives on traditional knowledge, science and climate change. Thompson comes from Hawaii, but his co-speakers came from Thailand, Chad, Fiji, Kenya and Norwegian Lapland.

The plight of South Pacific islanders was one of the main themes of this year’s [Arctic Circle Assembly](#), organised in Reykjavik for the fifth consecutive year. This year’s event (held from October 13 to 15) was particularly broad in scope, with a choice of 105 breakout sessions (seminars) as well as speeches and panel discussions.

In recent years, marine pollution and the impact of microplastics on oceans have become very topical. In an attempt to tackle this problem, Dutch physical oceanographer Erik van Sebille has devised an interactive [map](#) to track the fate of plastics.

Reporting that more than 70 percent of all floating plastic emanating from northwest Europe ends up in the Arctic, he and his colleagues organised an expedition to Svalbard and Jan Mayen earlier this year where they found a piece of damaged fishing net that had originally entered the sea off Nova Scotia in the year 2000, along with a small plastic ship that was traced to a 1958 cereal packet in the United Kingdom.

Tom Barry from the [Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna](#) programme introduced the [State of Arctic Marine Biodiversity](#) report for monitoring, which came out in May 2017 and includes key findings and advice for monitoring. “The key tool is the framework the marine plan has put in place to facilitate repeatable reporting and communicating on the status and trends of Arctic marine biodiversity,” he said.

Barry noted that disappearing sea ice has an effect on plant and animal life because when sea ice disappears it poses a challenge for various communities.

Like last year, Inuit communities were a major focus at the three-day gathering, but this time the emphasis was more on traditional knowledge (TK) than renewable energy.

Memorial University in Canada has developed a programme called [Smart Ice](#), which coordinates science with local traditional issues. The initiative involves listening to and working with communities, bringing people together, identifying priorities, and integrating TK with university knowledge. Canadian northern communities, which consist largely of Inuit peoples, rely to a great extent on sea ice for hunting, wood collection and other necessities.

In Norway, reported Anders Oskal from Norway's [International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry](#), the Arctic Council's [Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme](#) works with reindeer herders and how they deal with climate change.

“The [Arctic Council](#) has been pioneering in including TK,” he said, but “the research side is more accepting of TK than is the management side, who say ‘we need objective knowledge to manage’... There is a need for more indigenous institutions, transboundary institutions, that blend the two types of knowledge, as some reindeer herders have PhDs.”

TK is included in the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change and a [traditional peoples' platform](#) has been set up to exchange knowledge, the Assembly heard. “A traditional peoples' and communities' pavilion will be set up in Bonn at COP 23 (the 2017 UN Climate Change Conference) which will involve seven regions,” said Hindou Ibrahim, co-chair of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change.

Action by individuals played an important role this year. Marco Braun from Canadian consultancy Ouranos pointed out in a plenary on climate change and energy that there is a time-lag of about 30 years after “switching off” – meaning that we need to act now if we are to curb climate change.

Developed at a few weeks' notice at the 2016 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 22) in Marrakech last year at the instigation of former Icelandic president Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, who also spearheaded the notion of an Arctic Circle assembly, [The Roadmap](#) mission was introduced in a plenary session at the assembly.

This consists of 20 constructive statements with a focus on ‘Doers’, as exemplified by the first statement of the Roadmap: “We believe the time is now. The time to take action. The time to do what has to be done to bring about the changes outlined in the Paris accords. The time to stop talking about ‘What’ and start figuring out ‘How’.”

The Assembly was also the venue for the first discussion about sustainable development goals ([SDGs](#)) in the Arctic. These will take place once a month and will eventually report back to the Arctic Council meeting in September 2018. Various issues were brought up, from the need for hunting communities in Greenland to have an input to the need to “get beyond the rhetoric” in relation to issues such as sustainable mining.

Maria Mjoll Jonsdottir, United Nations Director at Iceland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs, told the audience. “Everything goes back to the main challenge, which is climate change. Iceland is looking at greener land; fish are moving to warmer waters. There is an integrated nature to these issues.” However, “Goal (SDG) 5, gender equality and the empowerment of women, is a key driver for reaching the other goals,” she concluded.

Education is another key issue, according to Heather Nicol from Trent University in Canada, who said that SDG goals should be made more applicable to small northern communities. “How do you support educational opportunities in small

communities in the north that do not have much access to education,” she asked. “And in relation to SDGs 16 and 17, she continued, “how does technology affect education and social infrastructure?”

The education issue also cropped up in other seminars. In a session on Arctic youth and sustainable futures, Diane Hirshberg from the University of Alaska Anchorage pointed out that access to education can be limited in small Alaskan communities.

“If you decide to move from your home community, you may end up having more students in your class than in your entire home community,” she said. “Sometimes,” she continued, “you may have to learn a second language” if the new school does not teach in the person’s native language. This produces stress and upheaval. Similar concerns also occur in Greenland.

The University of the Arctic ([UArctic](#)) is made up of a group of universities, research institutes and various organisations dealing with education and research in northern climes. Its Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security has been holding seminars every year at the Arctic Circle Assembly. One seminar this year looked at the environmental damage caused by the military in peacetime and another looked at climate change as the new security threat.

Lassi Heinenen from the University of Lapland was one of the organisers of the sessions. He explained that at least 141 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalents were released during the Iraq war between March 2003 and 2007. “The military is some sort of protected polluter,” he says. “Think of all the resources used during the military exercise with Russia and Belarus a few weeks ago,” he pointed out, referring to the [ZAPAD 2017 exercise](#).

During the Cold War, parts of Russia became a dumping ground for old ammunition, petroleum products and other military debris. Anatoly Shevchuk, professor at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, described Russia’s clean-up of the dumping ground of Franz Josef archipelago which has been ongoing since 2012, and says they are about to start work on cleaning up Kola Bay.

A second seminar looked at climate change as the new threat. In this, Wilfrid Greaves from Canada’s University of Victoria looked at climate change versus urbanisation, pointing out that cities with large infrastructures are more vulnerable to climate change while the impact of climate change on cities is underestimated. “Warming in urban areas is 10 times that of non-urban areas,” he noted. [IDN- InDepthNews – 25 October 2017]

Cuban Youth Mastering the Art of Economic Improvisation

By Julia Rainer

TRINIDAD, Cuba (IDN) – Trinidad, one of the most popular cities in Cuba, is a place where time seems to stand still. At least that is what the thousands of tourists who come here every year from all over the world are made to believe.

Colonial cathedrals and majestic houses have been guarding the city for hundreds of years and are beautifully restored as if time had never passed. Indeed, the picturesque city – together with the marvellous surrounding sugarcane plantations – were declared [UNESCO world cultural heritage](#) in 1988.

It is part of Trinidad's unique charm that nothing is supposed to change – a concept that can be transferred to Cuba's tourism strategy as a whole.

In recent years there has been an enormous trend to travel to the island nation in the middle of the Caribbean, precisely because the decades of isolation and the socialist economic system led by Fidel Castro have left the country in an almost "time capsule" state.

Low crime rates and the stable – or enshrined – political conditions compared with other Central American countries have added to the appeal of Cuba as *the* tourist destination to visit.

Following loosening of U.S. restrictions on Cuba and with U.S. tourists increasingly starting to frequent the island, the former "outsider" Cuba has risen to new heights, gaining much of its national income through tourism.

2016 was the first year in which more than four million tourists travelled to the island. This year there have been 45 percent more visitors from North America, 33 percent more from Europe and 16 percent more from Latin America.

However, Cuba finds itself with a dilemma – tourists are flooding the nation to see that nothing has changed for hundreds of years, but in order to deal with these developments the government needs to allow innovation, change and progress to be part of the process.

Furthermore it is not possible to fully preserve a socialist economic system while allowing millions of people from capitalist countries to enter the state.

Cuba is waking up from its isolation like Sleeping Beauty, caught in a mixed system with socialist and capitalist influences.

Confronted with tourists constantly displaying their iPhones and waving other brand new technical gadgets in their faces, Cubans are beginning to call for change, and it is island's young people who are at the forefront of the arousal.

Just a few decades ago, many Cubans saw little to no possibility of being successful within the country. Now many of the young generation are impatient to see where newly-arrived progress can lead their country.

Lyhán Arango Alfonso, Carlos Alberto Alonso Duffay (known as Carlitos), Laura Vaillant and Yilién Moje are four young entrepreneurs living in Trinidad, who have taken the bull by the horns.

They recently opened a coffee shop/bar in the city centre that is the exact opposite of what many tourists are expecting to see in a traditional Cuban setting. It is not the sound of salsa and reggaeton, but European and American electro-music, which is attracting the locals and tourists who frequent the bar.

The location, a real eye-catcher, looks like you could have stumbled in there off one of Berlin's trendy streets or one of New York's boho-chic neighbourhoods. Chairs hang from the ceiling and the unique artwork, made by co-owner Laura, is nowhere to be found in the cliché tourist shops of the city.

The only hint of its Cuban origin is a book with the diaries of revolutionary Che Guevara, controversially placed on a bridal magazine on one of the tables.

A few years ago, opening an establishment like this would have been impossible due to strict government regulations on economic activity. The experience of owning a business is therefore relatively new for many Cubans.

In a country where education and access to university is free and well established, but where – after years of studying – a lawyer earns 20 to 25 dollars a month, many are now trying to explore this new-found economic freedom.

Like the group of friends from Trinidad who transformed the living room of Carlito's family home into one of the most striking bars of the hundred-year old city in just 15 days.

Lyhán and Carlitos, who knew each other from university, were the founders of the project. "One day I went to Carlito's house and said: Hey, you have such a good place to make a bar, right?" "OK, let's do it," he replied.

"And we just started. We didn't have anything to make a bar. We didn't have money, no music records, we just started making it with the stuff we could find", Lyhán recalls with pride. Carlito's mother immediately supported their idea, offering a huge part of her house to the two young men in their early twenties.

What may not seem like a big deal in capitalist countries means a great deal in a place where one of the only possibilities for income and engaging freely in the economic system is the tourism sector.

This is why there are thousands of Cubans sharing their homes with tourists in so called "casa particulares", more or less the airbnb of Cuba.

With Carlito taking care of the location and his grandmother offering tables and some of the decor, local art school student Laura pitched in with her decorating work and start-up money came from Lyhán who worked at night as a musician in the city's many restaurants. Yilién, a local girl speaking French – which is a real asset in the highly touristic city – was the last to join the group, and the "fantastic four", as they call themselves, were complete.

There was no business plan, no real seed capital, no security, just a dream to build a place that was completely different to anything else that could be found in Trinidad. One day they even hope to transform the bar into a local cultural centre, where the aspiring artists and musicians of the city will be able to perform.

In order to get their project under way, they could have taken money from the state, which was supporting new business owners, but because they did not know if their plan could be successful, they did not dare taking the risk and decided to rely only on themselves.

And so far it has worked. They celebrated their first day in business on November 25, 2016, a memorable day in every sense, as Lyhán recalls. “We were just starting the inauguration party, when there was suddenly a lot of commotion. By chance we had opened our bar on the same day that Fidel Castro died!”

The four young entrepreneurs still face constant challenges, like the country’s bureaucracy which is difficult to deal with. For example, the government currently does not issue permits for bars, so the group had to resort to a restaurant permit which results in having to pay much higher taxes.

Sometimes an undercover government official visits the bar to check how many customers are being served and adjust the tax to be paid, which can then be relatively high, although the bar might only have had one very lucrative day.

Despite all obstacles the business is going well. Maybe the secret to success is that the friends have resorted to a strategy that most Cubans have been following successfully for decades – improvising and making the best of any situation.

Indeed, even improvisation was needed when it came to the sign for the group’s bar, which is known as ‘El Mago’ – The Magician.

Due to the fact that the city is a world cultural heritage, it is not allowed by law to put up new signs on colonial walls.

So, as always, a creative way was found to deal with this challenge. Every day, on his way to open the bar, Carlito carries a suitcase with the name of the establishment painted on it, which he then carefully hangs up over the door.

It seems ironic that it is a suitcase – a symbol for the many people who have left the country over the decades in order to find their future somewhere else – which might now be determining the future of four young entrepreneurs. [IDN-
InDepthNews – 15 October 2017]

Giving Visibility – and Land Rights – to the Indigenous

By Fabíola Ortiz

STOCKHOLM (IDN) – Indigenous peoples are all but invisible on the development agenda but a hoped for change is on the cards with the launch of the world's first and only funding institution to support the efforts of local and native communities to secure rights over their lands and resources.

“Include us, so that we can protect our lands for our children and protect the planet's biodiversity for all the world's children,” said by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples during the launch. Recognising the land rights of native and traditional peoples is a low-cost solution toward achieving the world's development, environment and climate agendas.

Known as the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility, the new institution dedicated to scaling up the recognition of collective land and forest rights was officially presented on October 3 during a conference in Stockholm organised by the Swedish government, the Ford Foundation and the Rights and Resources Initiative ([RRI](#)).

For most indigenous people, “land is everything,” continued Tauli-Corpuz. Having secure rights over their lands ensures that “they can feed their families and practise their culture and traditional knowledge.”

Almost 2.5 billion people, one-third of the world's population, depend on community-held lands for their livelihoods. They manage more than half the planet's land area in traditional systems, yet indigenous peoples and local communities have formal legal ownership of only 10% of the world's lands, according to a 2015 RRI report.

The Tenure Facility will invest 10 million dollars a year for the next decade in titling projects. This funding could increase titled, protected tropical forestland by 40 million hectares, preventing the emission of more than 0.5 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide.

It will work with indigenous and community leaders to take advantage of laws that are already on the books to strengthen their rights, said RRI coordinator Andy White, stressing that the Tenure Facility is aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

“Indigenous peoples have cared for the forests for centuries, despite increasing pressure from governments and private interests that want access to the land and its soil, the timber in the trees and the minerals in the ground below,” said White.

The Tenure Facility has kicked off with six pilot projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America covering two million hectares of forest in six countries – Cameroon, Indonesia, Liberia, Mali, Panama and Peru.

The tropical rainforest in Peru, which is part of the Amazon basin, is an interesting case in which more than half of the country's territory is forest, and much of that land is occupied by indigenous people.

After Bolivia, Peru is the South American country with the second highest proportion of indigenous population. Approximately 20 million hectares are pending titling in favour of indigenous people – corresponding to 15 percent of Peruvian territory.

“We cannot design public policies and conservation strategies without including the indigenous,” Silvana Baldovino, programme director of the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law, told IDN. “We cannot create rules inside a cabinet without speaking to the native peoples. It would be illogical to draw conservation policies without engaging who are actually on the ground.”

Baldovino was in Stockholm to talk about the successful Peruvian case of titling and managing forests. “Madre de Dios has a large percentage of its region as protected natural areas. It is important for the indigenous peoples to have their land demarcated. It is a historic debt,” he said.

The tropical Madre de Dios region in the southeast part of Peru covers 800,000 hectares and is under constant pressure from illegal logging, gold mining and oil exploration.

In the region, there are seven indigenous peoples living in 36 communities. Many of these communities require legal and physical clarification of their territorial claims before they can secure their titles.

This first pilot project supported by the Tenure Facility helped to map five communities. Over 112,000 hectares were geo-referenced, enabling three communities to actually obtain the title of their land.

Securing tenure would also set the stage for more sustainable and equitable development, as well as reducing conflict over land, agrees Nonette Royo, the Tenure Facility's executive director.

“The whole world is looking at the Amazon forest,” she told IDN. “At the moment, the indigenous peoples are experiencing such a huge challenge: they occupy places where most of the forests are still growing and stand. They have protected these places for generations.”

At least one-quarter of the carbon stored above the ground in the tropical forests is found in the collectively managed territories of indigenous peoples and local communities, according to a [study](#) released in November 2016.

This amount represented 70 percent of what was emitted globally in 2015, according to the International Energy Agency. [IDN-InDepthNews – 7 October 2017]

Orphans of Conflict in DR Congo Learning a Brazilian Martial Art to Overcome Pain

By Fabíola Ortiz

GOMA (IDN) - Since February this year, 16-year old Melvin* lives in a shelter for former child soldiers in the suburbs of Goma, the capital city of North Kivu province in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He belongs to a small community.

His story resembles that of many Congolese boys living in the faraway communities in eastern DRC. He was abducted from his home village to forcedly join the Nyatura rebels – a Mayi-Mayi ethnic community-led armed group founded in 2010 mainly by the Congolese Hutus. Among the human rights violations they have been accused of is the recruitment of child soldiers – one of the most heinous crimes they have committed.

It is two years now that the introverted Melvin, who has lost track of his family, has not been able to return to his community. He is likely to be one among thousands of orphans from the conflict.

Between 2010 and 2013, the [UN documented](#) no less than 4,194 cases of child recruitment, according to the last [DRC country report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict](#). Approximately one-third of the documented cases involved children less than 15 years of age. 76 per cent took place in North Kivu. Their testimonies accounted for being used as combatants, escorts, cooks, porters, guards and sex slaves.

At least 65,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups worldwide in the past ten years (2007-2017), said the [UNICEF Executive Director](#) Anthony Lake in February 2017. More than 20,000 were in the DRC. Exact data on the number of children used and recruited in armed conflict are difficult to confirm because of the unlawful nature of child recruitment. However, UNICEF estimates that tens of thousands of boys and girls under the age of 18 are used in conflicts worldwide.

"UN verified figures are likely to represent only a portion of the problem given access issues for the purposes of verification, including insecurity and fighting, terrain and infrastructure problems, and government restrictions on access to armed groups," according to the Senior Program Manager Bonnie Berry of [Watchlist](#) on Children and Armed Conflict.

The introverted Melvin is now being taken care of by a local non-profit organization named *Programme d'Appui à la lutte contre la Misère* (Program to Support the Fight Against Poverty – PAMI) based in Goma. Created in 1997, it is one of the Congolese partners of UNICEF to work on the verification process of children who have been associated with armed forces and armed groups (called CAFAG) and to run a center sheltering unaccompanied children.

After months of fighting in the bush, Melvin decided to escape with other nine boys. "There were a lot of young people and children in the group. I would say there were in total around 2,000 rebels. I ran away carrying a weapon. It would be very dangerous if I ever go back to my village, they would kill me," Melvin told IDN.

Now, he is living under the PAMI premises in Goma. Life has completely changed for him since he was welcomed in the shelter. "It is very different from the life I led in the armed group," he said.

The reclusive and introspective boy has now found a new meaning for his daily life and a way of expressing himself and regain self-esteem. For five months, he has been playing a Brazilian martial art with African roots called Capoeira.

This cultural practice, simultaneously a fight and a dance, promotes mutual respect and social cohesion and was inscribed in 2014 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in UNESCO.

In the DRC, a UNICEF initiative named "*Capoeira pour la Paix*" (in French) – funded by Canada, Sweden, AMADE-Mondile, Belgium and the Brazilian Embassy in Kinshasa – has been included in the DDR program (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) for children.

"We knew about the fact that Capoeira was being used with vulnerable children in Haiti and also in Panama. It started like a pilot project to see how we could integrate 'Capoeira for Peace' within the DDR children program to support the rehabilitation of children released from armed groups and armed forces," explained Marie Diop, a UNICEF child protection specialist in eastern DRC bureau.

This last summer, the initiative commemorated three years and has now been fully integrated in the psychosocial support activities in the transit care centers in Goma. "It is through Capoeira that children are now able to cohabit in a very peaceful manner with other children and adults. Capoeira has helped a lot in de-stigmatizing the children," said Diop.

The 29 year-old Alex Karibu born in Kinshasa became one of the Capoeira teachers of the initiative. As a UN volunteer, he develops the Capoeira classes for children who have been demobilized from rebels in eastern DRC.

"It has been twelve years that I practice, Capoeira came to my life as a positive change and inspired me to recover my self-confidence. I thought to myself from the very first moment that I wanted to become a Capoeira ambassador in my country," said Karibu.

For him, this martial art enables to bring people together, overcome social differences and gather the participants as a family reunion. "It makes us all become brothers and sisters, it does not induce aggressiveness and helps in promoting harmony, peace, love and mutual respect," suggested.

Since he arrived in North Kivu, early 2016, he has noticed progressive change within the children. "It is not easy for boys who have been in armed groups, most

of them had to leave behind their families. I tell them I'm here to help and they can trust me. Many of them have been abused and mistreated."

As a consequence of trauma, children naturally close themselves as a 'rock', but little by little they learn they can regain trust. "We do as with a flower, we irrigate with drops of love and respect to help them in their transformation process. We're planting a seed for these children to bloom."

For Joachim Fikiri who coordinates PAMI, the first step would be the breaking of the cycle of violence within the communities. The use of Capoeira, he said, is helping to integrate and to spread peace when children are back to their families.

"Children's needs are enormous due to the conflict. Together with UNICEF and UN peacekeeping mission ([MONUSCO](#)), we work in all stages of the DDR for children, verifying their situation and defending their rights. I wished Capoeira was taught and practiced in every community to gather different ethnicities," he suggested.

Some unaccompanied children who are under the care of PAMI live with hosting families, *familles d'accueil* (in French), as a stage of introducing them to the civil and family life again.

It has been five years that Françoise Furaha, 38, became a hosting family to receive vulnerable unaccompanied children. Her small two bedroom sized house located in Quartier Keshero, in the surroundings of Goma, has received throughout the years 28 girls and 16 boys. Nowadays she hosts a Rwandan boy who regularly attends Capoeira classes in PAMI.

"It was my inner instinct that made me choose to become a hosting family. We all learn from him and from his life story. In the morning we pray, we have meals together and when he is back from PAMI centre, he is always happier. He usually says: 'let me teach you Capoeira, let me teach you how to do *ginga* [the basic swing of the martial art]'. It is a good thing for all of us," said Furaha.

*The name has been changed to protect the identity of the person. [IDN-
InDepthNews – 5 October 2017

Clean Energy Coming to Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp

By Justus Wanzala

KAKUMA, Kenya (IDN) – As the sun shrinks into a red ball steadily disappearing beyond the horizon, residents of Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County, north-western Kenya, adjust to their evening routines. Late shoppers rush out to food stores, school children pick up their books and mothers start preparing the last meal of the day.

Darkness quickly envelopes the camp – which is administered by the *UN Refugee Agency* ([UNHCR](#)) – and only a few businesses and homesteads are in the fortunate position of possessing diesel generators or solar and kerosene lanterns to provide lighting. Like most places in northern Kenya, Kakuma refugee camp – home to some 170,000 refugees from neighbouring South Sudan, Burundi, Somalia and Congo among others – is off grid, meaning that access to electricity for lighting and other uses is limited.

Even for those refugees and displaced people who might have heard talk of the UN Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), goal 7 on “access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” may seem like a faraway dream.

Indeed, living without access to electricity is something that refugees like Diana Byulwesenge from Rwanda have learned to live with since the camp became her home five years ago. She complains that the paraffin she uses for cooking and lighting emits smoke and is not the safest source of energy for her health and that of her children.

She says would welcome access to solar energy but is concerned about the price. “The money I receive from the *UNHCR* is only sufficient to feed my family. For cooking, I use fire wood and briquettes or charcoal.”

Najma Hassan, another refugee, says she uses a diesel generator to power her home and due to the high fuel cost she only uses it for lighting. She is forced to buy charcoal for her cooking needs.

However, Diana and Najma now seem set to benefit from a project that will ensure greater access to affordable, clean energy for their camp, and this energy will be sufficient for domestic use and the powering of micro-businesses.

The Moving Energy Initiative ([MEI](#)) has unveiled projects that will benefit the refugees in Kakuma, including a solar-powered information communication technology (ICT) hub in the camp and health clinics that will serve refugees and the host community with solar power.

MEI is a partnership involving several organisations: [Chatham House](#), [Energy 4 Impact](#), [Practical Action](#), UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council ([NRC](#)). The programme is funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development ([DfID](#)) and its main partner is UNHCR which is working closely with the Kenyan government.

Under the projects, solar power will be used for delivery of education services and creation of opportunities for local entrepreneurs. These include mobile phone charging businesses and small shops. Refugees and locals will also be trained on the use and maintenance of clean energy technologies.

The consortium already has similar projects under way in Burkina Faso and Jordan aimed at sustainably addressing the energy needs of refugees and displaced persons, and the communities hosting them.

Two firms in Kenya, Kube Energy and Crown Agents, have been selected to implement the Kakuma camp projects, with Kube Energy to instal solar systems at two primary health care clinics operated by the International Rescue Committee ([IRC](#)) in the camp. Crown Agents will build a solar-powered ICT and learning hub for the displaced community living within the camp and for its host community. The hub will be used for skills training and provision of commercial services for local entrepreneurs.

It is envisaged that the projects will use the learning hub as a location for selling pay-as-you-go (PAYG) solar home systems to local residents. One significant aspect of the one-year project is that reductions in CO2 emissions and access to services and livelihood opportunities will be enhanced.

Joe Attwood, MEI Programme Manager explained that the goal of MEI is to help address challenges that the humanitarian community faces in delivering affordable and safe energy to refugees. “Many attempts have been tried before and many have failed, we are using a new approach that brings the skills and experience of the private sector into providing energy to camp occupants,” he said.

According to Attwood, who did not reveal the cost of the projects, several sustainable energy solutions will be offered, including photovoltaic cells to provide electricity to one of the clinics in Kakuma and also to an education/community hub.

He said that the projects are eventually expected to finance themselves. “Many of the energy projects fail in refugee camps because there is no long-term thinking in order to develop the finance to keep systems running. We want to change that using private sector skills in creating revenue and using it to keep the systems afloat,” he explained.

Attwood also stressed that the initiative will also lessen dependence on firewood for cooking, improving people's health and curbing deforestation, while in terms of social development, it will help improve livelihoods.

“Our education and community hub will help train refugees and local community members in vocational/jobs skills.” said Atwood, adding that MEI is putting in place interventions to ensure vulnerable populations are not taken advantage of because “the two organisations we are financing recognise the socio-political vulnerabilities of refugees.”

Kate Hargreaves, director of Crown Agents Foundation, said it intends to establish a solar-powered ‘one-stop shop’ in Kakuma for access to the internet, computer

equipment, skills training and social events which will be available to refugees and the local community.

She echoed Attwood in noting that care has been taken to ensure that facilities are affordable for both refugees and local community. He adds, “because of the technology we are using we can keep costs low”.

According to Hargreaves, the project will stimulate a reduction in household pollution and lower the carbon footprint at Kakuma.

When informed about the project, Diana and Najma were enthusiastic, with Najma saying that her prayer is that MEI introduces a multi-purpose solar appliance that can be used for the provision of energy for lighting and cooking. [IDN-InDepthNews – 26 July 2017]

How People and Governments are Working Together to Implement



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

Project period: 2017-2018

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