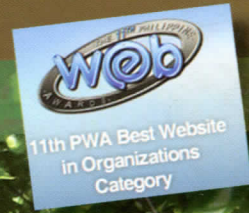


# Voices from the forest



[www.ntfp.org](http://www.ntfp.org)



VIETNAM

## mountain medicine man

By Crissy Guerrero, NTFP-EP

Phong looked at his baby, Kim Ngoc, smiled and shared with us his story. Over a year ago, his wife, Tien, was complaining of pains in the lower abdomen. Phong decided to bring her to the doctor trained in Western medicine. To his dismay, the doctor pronounced that his wife had a grave illness in her kidney and she had to be operated on immediately or she would never be able to deliver another baby. Phong did not believe the doctor and instead bet with him that he would be able to heal his wife with medicines from forest plants. Kim Ngoc was proof enough that he had won that wager. (continued on next page ...)

### ALSO INSIDE:

- EXCHANGE NEWS ... STARTING PAGE 3
- REDD HOT DEBATES: EXPLORING CARBON REVENUES FOR FOREST DWELLING COMMUNITIES ... 6
- MONDULKIRI HONEY GOING WILD ... 8
- COMMUNITIES TAKE NTFPS TO TRADE FAIR ... 9
- KEDANG PAHU RATTAN CRAFTS LEARNING & DOING ... 10
- ARE YOU AN NTFP GAMER? ... 12
- WESTERN GHATS: A HOTSPOT FOR NTFPS ... 13
- GENDER: IT SHOULDN'T BE A BATTLE ... 14

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healers including traditional birth attendants, but only women were asked to go to the health workshops. When women were offered participation in socio-economic projects, which they greatly appreciated, their productive roles took on more of their time, though there was no corresponding lessening of time for the reproductive tasks. And yet men could not be seen taking on more reproductive roles.

But why care about all these? For me, the answers lie in talking with the village women. In public they would staunchly declare that they felt that they were equals, that they trusted the men to make the right decisions for the household in public assemblies, that they were content with their roles and their life. But in more intimate conversations, they would share their aspirations about being able to explore the world beyond their mountains and their forests, about wanting to complete formal education and acquiring a job if only they were not yet tied to the care of the children and the home, about their own ideas for a better community which were never taken into consideration because these differed from the ideas of their men.

Even the men of indigenous communities had less opportunities – when compared with mainstream societies – to explore the world, to go school, to get a regular job, to have a voice in public, and the like. But it was very evident that the indigenous women had much, much less opportunities. If we say that we are engaging in development work to help bring about a better society, then the opportunities should be made available for both the women and the men – it should be a better society for both the men and the women.

Many months and many treks later to other rural communities, I was to realize that the situation in this Manobo community in relation to gender was not unique.

Gender isn't and shouldn't be about the battle of the sexes. Becoming "equal" does not mean becoming "the same," a frequently pointed out fear. Being gender-responsive should be about helping both women and men to shape their personhood and to develop their full human potential, without being constrained by societal expectations of what a man or a woman should be and can only be.

But I hope for another chance to go back to this particular community. I hope that when I do, I will find that the women's secret dreams are no longer secret. More than that, I hope that these dreams are on their way to being realized. For if we want to hear the voices from the forests, the united chorus of both women and men will certainly be heard more than the lonelier sound of only half the community, if only the men or only the women were allowed to have a voice.

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## Keystone makes finals of prestigious World Challenge 2008

With great pride, we congratulate NTFP-EP partner Keystone Foundation, a finalist in the recently concluded World Challenge 2008, a global competition aimed at finding projects or small businesses from around the world that have shown enterprise and innovation at a grassroots level.

Highlighted was Keystone's work in wild honey, particularly its efforts in keeping this ancient and sustainable tradition alive by creating markets for wild honey. A short film entitled "Cliffhangers" was broadcast worldwide on BBC last October 2008. A portion of the film can be viewed at:

<http://www.theworldchallenge.co.uk/2008-finalists-project01.php>

From the World Challenge site:

"For generations the Adivasi people of Southern India have specialised in collecting honey from wild bee colonies on cliffs. The hunters are lowered by ropes towards the colonies, where they waft smoke to calm the bees before breaking off a chunk of comb. Even in times of hunger, the hunters are always careful to leave enough of the nest for the bee colonies to recover. "They have been able to come up with systems that respect the bees and the environment," explains Keystone's Matthew John. "There are certain areas where they do not touch the combs at all, because they feel they are holy cliffs. But for us they are gene pools that they are preserving."

Special Advertising Feature

# WORLD CHALLENGE 08

## Meaningful Action...

World Challenge, created in association with Shell, is an annual global competition that honors inventive local solutions to our planet's most difficult problems, from poverty to environmental degradation. The winner of World Challenge will receive a \$20,000 grant, and two runners-up will each receive \$10,000 to invest in the future of their projects.

**CLIFFHANGER / Keystone Foundation, India**



There's gold in the tropical forests of South India. But it's liquid gold, not solid. And you don't dig for it – you climb. At least that's what the honey hunters of Tamil Nadu and Kerala do: for generations, they've boldly scaled steep cliffs to retrieve the combs of wild honey bees living there. But though they're following a centuries-old tradition, these members of so-called "primitive" forest communities collect their gold in a very modern way – sustainably. That's important, especially when it comes to honey, a natural resource that's threatened by dwindling numbers of honey bees worldwide. Keystone Foundation is working to support the sustainable practice of the honey hunters and help them to sell their product for a fair price. A dozen or so years ago, Keystone started its work with just three villages – it now assists 50 with everything from processing to marketing and sales. What's more, it's helping them to make maximal use of this precious resource: the once-wasted beeswax culled from honeycombs, for instance, is now repurposed as candles and other products.

World Challenge 08 vignettes can be seen on BBC World

www.theworldchallenge.co.uk

BBC WORLD NEWS

Shell  
empowering business  
on the energy challenge

Keystone's work featured in Newsweek



Congratulations to Ms. Dioning Banua for the successful completion of her MS in Environmental Management under the International Fellowships Program of the Ford Foundation! Dioning is NTFP-EP Board Member and past NATRIPAL Executive Director.