

A little goes a long way

“If you say someone’s gone to collect *loba*,” explains Tony Cunningham, an ethno-botanist with People and Plants International, “it means they’ve died and gone to their ancestors in the mountains where they first settled. It is in these tiny and remote forests where *loba* occurs.” Few people in West Nusa Tenggara, where you can hear this expression, will have seen this unusual tree in its natural habitat. *Loba* is one of the few plants which not only tolerates aluminium-rich soils – a killer for most crop plants – but is a hyper-accumulator of aluminium. But it’s more than just a botanical curiosity: aluminium sulphate, extracted from the bark, is used as a mordant to fix the red dyes used by weavers in Indonesia. Unfortunately, habitat loss and over-harvesting mean collectors must now travel to remote mountain forests to find it. Hence the metaphor.

A research project funded through CIFOR by the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID) has shed new light on this extraordinary plant and its importance to textile weavers – some 12,000 still use natural dyes – in Indonesia. It all began when the Bali-based Yayasan Pecinta Budaya Beali (YPBB) and its partner organisation, Threads of Life, visited CIFOR’s headquarters in Bogor to talk to Patricia Shanley, a researcher with a wide knowledge of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). The Threads of Life staff had plenty of experience related to weaving, but knew little about the botany of mordant plants and sustainable harvesting. Shanley realised that People and Plants International could help, and part of a USAID grant was used to develop a research project.

Tony Cunningham visited Indonesia, identified the dye and mordant, and provided technical and training support to the Threads of Life Foundation, the US non-profit organisation through which the grant was channelled. “Threads of Life has found a remarkable network of otherwise isolated weavers across Indonesia who have managed to keep the traditions of natural dyeing alive,” explains Cunningham. “We found that they had a very sophisticated knowledge of plant chemistry, but they didn’t know how to use the resources sustainably.”

A series of workshops, also supported by the Ford Foundation, has helped local communities to develop management plans for *loba* and key dye plants. “This project, and other activities run by Threads of Life and YPBB, will help to maintain the traditions of natural weaving and dyeing, ensure the sustainability of the resource and improve household incomes,” says Cunningham.

CIFOR has used similarly modest sums from the USAID linkage programme to finance other projects which have been researching the marketing, trade and sustainability of NTFPs as far afield as Mexico and Namibia. “When you look at what these small grants have achieved, in terms of research and improving livelihoods, it’s hard to imagine money being better spent,” reflects Shanley. This also provides an excellent example of CIFOR’s ‘centre without walls’ ethos.



Prof Chuck Peters from People and Plants International explaining to Willy Kadati and Wayan how to do inventories as the basis for a forest management plan. (Tony Cunningham)

CIFOR in Cameroon

Over 80 million people depend on the forests of the Congo Basin for their livelihoods, and CIFOR has a long history of research in the region. CIFOR's mission to protect the environment and tackle poverty in the Congo Basin was boosted by the signing of a new agreement between CIFOR and the Government of Cameroon in 2007.

According to CIFOR's Regional Coordinator, Cyrie Sendashonga, the new Host Country Agreement acknowledges the importance of CIFOR's collaborative research. "Governments, research centres, farmers, industries and NGOs must work together," explains Sendashonga. "This is essential if the forests of the Congo Basin nations are to continue to support millions of livelihoods without suffering irreversible environmental damage."

The agreement was signed by Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara, Cameroon's Minister of External Relations, and CIFOR's Director General, Frances Seymour, at a ceremony in the Cameroon capital, Yaoundé. This was the DG's first official visit to Central Africa, and at the ceremony she talked to government officials, colleagues from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, CIFOR staff and the media. She praised Cameroon for taking a lead in forestry reforms. "Cameroon has been a centre of innovation in forest law and practice, serving as a laboratory throughout the world, experimenting with new models of decentralisation, concession allocation and revenue distribution," she said.

Later in the year, the Government of Burkina Faso also signed a Host Country Agreement with CIFOR.



Cameroon's Minister of External Relations, Jean-Marie Atangana, presents the host country agreement to CIFOR's Director General, Frances Seymour. (Patrick Nyemeck)

The greening of CIFOR

At the 2006 annual staff meeting, it was agreed that much more needed to be done to reduce CIFOR's ecological footprint. A Greening Committee – it has attracted over 40 members of staff from CIFOR and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), which shares the campus in Bogor – has initiated a range of projects. "We started with the little things," explains Lia Wan, CIFOR's Facilities Services Officer, "but we are getting increasingly ambitious. I think we've helped to make people much more aware of the things they can do to reduce the impact they have on the environment." The national staff have been especially active on the Greening Committee.

There has been a strong emphasis on reducing waste and recycling. There are no more disposable plastic cups by the water machines. Signs exhort staff to use double-sided printing, or better still, not to print at all. Waste paper is collected and recycled into notebooks. Green waste is composted and fallen trees are fashioned into benches and tables, rather than burnt or left to rot. Waste water is now been used in the gardens and electricity consumption has been reduced by raising the temperature of the air conditioning and using energy-efficient bulbs.

An organisation like CIFOR, with its far-flung research sites and global programmes, can't avoid extensive air travel. Even domestic car travel, with many staff living some 50 kilometres away in Jakarta, adds considerably to the centre's carbon emissions. Now, all the cars owned by CIFOR and CIFOR staff are regularly tested to ensure that their emissions are kept at a minimum. Staff are also taking to their bikes, with some hardy souls occasionally cycling to work from Jakarta and many regularly cycling from their homes in Bogor. On September 7th – Indonesia's national 'bike to work' day – dozens of CIFOR and ICRAF staff cycled to the mayor's residence at 6 o'clock in the morning, teamed up with some of his staff, rode to Bogor City Hall, and then made their way *en masse* to CIFOR's office.

Director General Frances Seymour stresses that this is just the beginning. "We intend to start by taxing our air travel and buying carbon offsets in 2008," she says. "Over time, our aim is to ensure that all our operations are carbon neutral."



CIFOR staff gather for Indonesia's 'bike to work' day. (Bogor B2W)