

ACTIVITY REPORT

Activity: Maramara NTFP Workshop
Financed by: OAS
Focal group: Indigenous communities of South-Eastern Suriname, from the village of Kwamalasamutu
Execution: The Amazon Conservation Team (ACT), Virginia, USA; President: Mark Plotkin; ACT Suriname Program Manager: Gwendolyn Emanuels.
Counterparts: the Trio Indigenous communities
Date: Monday July 12th - Friday July 23rd, 2004

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of the field workshops and participant-observation style research was to gather baseline information on maramara harvest and processing and to make an initial assessment of maramara's potential as a sustainably-harvested NTFP. In the report produced we were able to present the benefits and challenges of maramara products as an NTFP and make recommendations for future actions by ACT.

COORDINATION:

The field workshops and research were facilitated by Ethnobotanist Bruce Hoffman and Culture & Education Coordinator; Beverly de Vries, both working for ACT Suriname.

PARTICIPANTS:

The participants were 2 females and 7 males from several of sub-tribes in Kwamalasamutu. For the first session (harvesting) all of the participants listed below were involved. The following five sessions only involved the 2 women listed since those were considered female activities. (see Annex 1 for a complete list of participants with name, age, sex, function).

ACTIVITY REPORT:

Monday July 12th, 2004

Morning: Harvesting

We asked the local ACT staff participants to show us a typical maramara harvest. We were led northwest from the village center for approximately 40 minutes through gardens and secondary forest to a zone of creek forest. The staff quickly guided us to a small maramara tree with a significant number of fruit clusters located at the apex. The tree was cut down with an axe by a male in the group. The fruits were picked from the branches of the fallen tree by the female participants. During the morning we discussed harvesting and the various options available as opposed to felling trees.

Monday July 12th, 2004

Afternoon: Processing

We spent the afternoon processing the maramara with the two female participants. Although some of the male participants were still around, they did not directly participate in the processing. The fruits were boiled for approximately 2 hrs until they became soft. In a creek near the village, the seeds were removed from the fruit husk by rubbing off the soft outer layer and repeatedly rinsing the seeds. After removing the outer layer completely, the seeds were put into a *manari* (a basket-like sieve) to dry. We

were able to gather information and discuss typical processing of the maramaras at this time. We also discussed ideas for improving the efficiency of processing.

Thursday July 15th, 2004

Dyeing: Tapanapi

Tapanapi (*Arrabidaea chica*, Bignoniaceae) is a common liana that grows in open places around the village. We picked 50-70 tapanapi leaves to dye a small portion of the maramara seeds. The leaves were put into a large pot of almost boiling water. Some of the dried maramara seeds were added and allowed to cook in the water for approximately an hour until the desired color was attained. The seeds turned a bright shade of pink and were put into a manari to dry.

Friday July 16th, 2004

Dyeing: Tawa

Tawa, a clay-like mud was collected from the bank of the Sipaliwini River as well as a nearby creek. This grey-green mud was put into a large pot with the dried maramara seeds and cooked for ½ an hour. Some tapanapi leaves were added and the mixture was later cooked again for 2 hours. After this the maramara seeds were left in the mixture for approximately a week. This should have yielded dark grey seeds but unfortunately the desired color was never attained.

Tuesday July 20th, 2004

Dyeing: Taari

Taari is a small to medium-sized forest tree (*Talisia sp.*, *Meliaceae*) occurring very abundantly in seasonally-flooded forest in the vicinity of Kwamalasamutu. We collected approximately 80 leaves of the taari tree to dye an additional small portion of the maramara seeds. The women first added them to a large container with approximately 2 cups of water. The leaves were pounded and ground with a large blunt stick in a wooden mortar-like pot for several minutes. The taari leaves turned a deep purple as did the water they were in. The water was removed and placed in a separate bowl with a portion of the maramaras and left to stand for several days.

Friday July 23rd, 2004

From seeds into beads

Once the seeds are dyed and dried completely, they are ready to be made into beads. Using a pointed metal wire, we were shown how to poke a hole into the center of each seed. The wire is long and thin and the seeds are stored on it until they are used in handicraft production. This is, by far, the most time-consuming portion of the entire maramara process. We were able to have lengthy discussions with participants about the possibilities of improving the sustainability of the harvest, the efficiency of the processing and the production of maramara handicrafts.

CHALLENGES:

As we soon came to realize during our research, the maramara harvest we participated in cannot be considered typical. Participants chose a small tree close to the village when normally they would go further from the village and choose a larger tree that bears more fruit. Thus, the entire process was anomalous due to the smaller volume of seeds and shorter time investment. Also, without the pressure of observers such as us, the processing of the seeds would occur sporadically over a longer period of time.

Our most important observation was that maramara harvest is typically done in an unsustainable way. No effort was made to use a long stick to knock or pull the fruits down or to climb the tree. The results of

unsustainable harvest are reflected in the increasingly further distances community members must travel to find harvestable maramara trees. We were told by maramara harvesters that they now must travel at least 2-3 hours away from the village. However, it is difficult to quantify time requirements for harvest activities because maramara harvest is usually a side activity combined with fishing and hunting trips. An additional factor working against sustainable harvest is that maramara trees have very soft wood and are easy to cut, which makes tree felling the most intelligent harvest method in the view of most villagers.

We determined in these field workshops that community members feel it is not possible to harvest maramara without cutting the trees down because either: 1) older trees are too large to climb; or 2) younger trees are too thin and unsafe to climb. The small tree harvested for this report was too slender to climb and the fruits were too high to reach with a stick. We found that participants in this workshop recognized a connection between destructive harvest practices and the decreasing abundance of harvestable maramara trees. More promising was that they expressed an interest in trying new approaches, even if they found some of our suggestions humorous.

We were surprised at the amount of effort required in the processing of the seeds even before craft production began and the small payback for the overall time investment. However, as noted above, our study was anomalous and the economies of scale would make the return somewhat better for a full-scale harvest from a large tree.

The creation and sale of maramara handicrafts in Kwamalasamutu cannot be considered as more than a minor trade at the present time. There is no organized production for sale to tourists or to Paramaribo. The trade takes place sporadically as individuals find time in their day to finish items. Furthermore, a large part of maramara craftwork revolves around gift-giving to outsiders. Maramara crafts are presently more of a cultural mainstay of Kwamalasamutu rather than an economic mainstay.

FOLLOW UP:

1. In the near future, we will take a group of ACT staff out for a fieldtrip to further examine the options for non-destructive maramara harvesting. The group will discuss and attempt different methods of harvest and we will demonstrate how to use botanical clipper poles to reach high places.
2. Once the local ACT staff members have participated, we will have a meeting with village leaders and other people in the village to share our findings.
3. Arboriculture seems promising because maramara can thrive in secondary forest and disturbed areas. Although participants generally had a doubtful view of planting maramara, we will continue to examine the possibility of planting Maramara trees. Local ACT staff members have been asked to bring small maramara plants and fruits back to the village whenever they find them. We will work with ACT staff members in the planting of maramara and in experimenting with seedling germination. If this proves successful, a full scale planting project can be undertaken.
4. We suggest that ACT aims for an integrated approach that encourages greater efficiency of harvest and production connected with more formal NTFP marketing of maramara products in Kwamalasamutu and Paramaribo. For example, maramara could be harvested as an activity in and of itself rather than the sporadic activity of individuals.
5. Additional uses of the maramara tree will also be documented. The Waiwai's of southern Guyana use the trunk of the maramara tree to make traditional drums. It is possible that a felled maramara tree could provide a much greater harvest value if Kwamalasamutu residents learned (or re-learned) drum-making as an additional NTFP activity.
6. Experimentation with natural dyes in addition to taari, tapanapi, and tawa should be encouraged to keep costs low and the processes "all-natural". Both the sustainable harvest and use of natural dyes are highly marketable qualities that will help to boost sales in outside markets.

Annex: List of Participants

Name	Function	Age	Sex
Shokonono	Apprentice	38	Female
Keiti	Apprentice	41	Female
Wuta	Apprentice	48	Male
Noeta	Foreman	39	Male
Ussuke	Equipment manager	43	Male
Awi	Apprentice	32	Male
Ihko	Field staff	36	Male
Jalouefa	Junior Shaman	55+	Male
Amesina	Junior Shaman	55+	Male