Held simultaneously in Indonesia and the Philippines, last November’s Regional Youth Menoken was Samdhana’s first online summit between Indigenous youth groups in Southeast Asia. The event gathered around 350 participants together through a combination of online dialogues and on-site programmes.

Photos courtesy of Youth Menoken participants.
Background image: Ciptagelar Village, West Java (photo by Andi Saragih)
A Year for Remaking Connections and Breaking Through

For many of us, the COVID pandemic became personal in 2021, as the disease impacted friends and family. With little respite and multiple spikes in cases, the journey at times felt like a rollercoaster ride. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) were seriously affected too; in the village of Malinao in North Kalimantan, for example, 316 people were infected last July and 12 individuals sadly passed away. During these difficult times, feelings of helplessness can be just as debilitating as the disease itself. However, in every crisis there is usually a glimmer of hope; the past year provided opportunities for collaboration towards our common goals, strengthening our shared commitments and paving the way towards recovery.

2021 was a time for…

**Building relationships.** The pandemic situation underlined the importance of relationships; it emphasised the value of face-to-face interactions but also the importance of staying in touch by whatever means necessary. Through it all, communication was key. We continued to build stronger ties. We look forward to working more closely with the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) in 2022, as we reach out to more IPLCs together.

**Learning.** We increased our appreciation of communications technology in 2021. Our offices in Indonesia and the Philippines both upgraded their comms setup, launching podcasts from simple recording studios. We will continue to embrace new technologies, documenting stories of repression as they unfold, to ensure they are remembered accurately and hopefully do not reoccur. We will continue looking for new ways to work together, to share Indigenous knowledge and achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the Center for Transdisciplinary and Sustainability Sciences (CTSS) of the Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) University.

**Enhancing creativity.** Samdhana found new and innovative ways to engage with our partners in 2021. In the run-up to the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26), we took part in the *Fork to Farm Dialogues*, which focused on climate justice and the role of the next generation in food production. We continue working on new initiatives, such as Weaving for the Future, in collaboration with the *Prince Charles School of Oriental and Islamic Arts* and the *Philippine Women’s University*.

**Persevering.** We supported around 350 young people from at least 18 locations across the region via the *Regional Youth Noken summit*, helping them interact and share their perspectives, their concerns and aspirations. This followed on from the local and global food dialogues organised by Samdhana and 13 partners across Southeast Asia, which involved around 160 participants and highlighted the centrality of local food producers to the *Climate Justice* movement. Samdhana will continue to persevere in 2022, to address the needs of IPLCs alongside our partners.

**Recalibrating.** Samdhana has adjusted its institutional targets to meet the challenges of the new normal era. Time is of the essence, so climate and gender justice work will figure more prominently than ever before in our recalibrated action plan. For these adaptive measures to work effectively, we must continue to recognise the importance of IPLCs’ rights to land, sea and ancestral territories. We must also ask ourselves: how can we accelerate recognition of these issues at the local and national levels? How do we catalyse engagement and spur institutions and bureaucracies into action, to achieve our aims more quickly?

Looking ahead to 2022, we need to ensure that gender equity and social inclusion are put into practice. We must pivot away from defensive positions and create opportunities that drive positive change. To that end, we are exploring potential new partnerships on gender work, particularly with the gender studies programme (*studi kajian gender*) in the University of Indonesia’s School of Strategic and Global Studies (SKSG).

As we move forward, we must remain driven by a sense of urgency. We need to seriously reconsider what actions could be game changers for the social and environmental movement in the months ahead and in the years beyond. If we are to achieve our twin aims of climate justice and gender justice, we must devise new solutions to long-standing problems. Working together at scale with our partners, we must ask ourselves difficult questions and do whatever it takes to find the answer.

Integral to this development will be the simple ethos of TLC – Tender Loving Care. All of us have a vital role to play in this journey together. We must value the unique perspectives and contributions of each individual – regardless of gender, ethnicity, experience, physical capabilities, position or status. Treating each other with dignity and respect on a personal level is just as important as meeting our targets to bring about change on a wider scale. The end does not justify the means. We must never turn a blind eye to harassment or bullying, but rather embody the principles of fairness we espouse and practice what we preach.
As we look back on 2021 and ahead to 2022, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all our partners, staff, board, fellows, volunteers, donors and everyone who supported us in 2021: *manaring salamat, terima kasih banyak, kop chai lai lai* and thank you very much. We have come through the trials and tribulations of 2021 together, in spite of the many challenges the past year has presented. Through it all, we’ve learned the value of having someone to lean on and someone to celebrate with.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and give thanks for the contributions of all those activists and partners who passed away during the last year. Their devotion to their communities, their heritage and the environmental movement will live on in the work we do. To continue their legacy and honour their memory, we must keep on fighting for positive change. From everyone at Samdhana, thank you.

Regards,

Suraya A. Afif
Chairperson of the Board, Samdhana Institute
Throughout 2021, and in spite of the COVID-19 situation, the Samdhana Institute continued working to bring its vision for the future more clearly into focus. We envisage a world in which natural, cultural and spiritual diversity are valued, where Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) hold land rights for their territories and have full recourse to the rule of law. Through a combination of independent leadership and organisational support, they will be responsible for their own development and well-being. Achieving this objective is a long and complex journey, but in the past year we have made significant progress towards our vision. Here are a few key milestones we reached along the way in 2021:

**New projects implemented**

In 2021, a trio of five-year projects were implemented by the Samdhana Institute: i) Power of Voices, in collaboration with the Fair, Green and Global Alliance (FGG3); ii) Forest for Just Futures, under the Green Livelihood Alliance (GLA 2); and iii) Expanding Community Rights, Livelihoods Innovation & REDD+ in Indonesia (PERMATA Project), supported by Norway’s International Climate and Forest Initiative (NICFI).

Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the FGG3 Alliance is helping IPLCs to secure land tenure, strengthen governance, develop management plans and engage with government and private sectors. In 2021, Samdhana became one of two new Alliance members, joining Action Aid, Both ENDS, the Clean Clothes Campaign, Milieudefensie, SOMO, the Transnational Institute and a new member, called IT for Change. As part of this alliance, we have since been able to connect with and support 98 civil society organisations (CSOs); both new and existing partners, including IPLCs, grassroots organisations, local NGOs and sub-regional networks in the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

**Forests for a Just Future** is the second Green Livelihood Alliance project we are implementing. The alliance is composed of Fern, Gaia Amazonas, IUCN-Netherlands, Milieudefensie, Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Program (NTFP-EP), the Sustainable Development Institute, Tropenbos International and Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF). Samdhana is a country partner, under the coordination of NTFP-EP, together with CSOs in the Philippines. The project is focused on the Northern Mindanao Lifescape, working with two communities in Bukidnon, namely the Higaonon tribe of the MAECATE Ancestral Domain Claim in the municipality of Baungon; and the Higaonon Community of Sitio Gutasan, Barangay Capehan Ancestral Domain Claim (HIGCAD), in the municipality of Libona. The two main objectives of the project are to support women and youths through meaningful participation in governance, while also protecting the remaining forests.

The PERMATA Project is being implemented as part of a consortium including Badan Registrasi Wilayah Adat (BRWA), the Urban and Regional Development Institute (URDI), Kitong Bisa, Perempuan Amran, Kaoem Telapak and the Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN). The project aims to contribute to the recognition of rights of IPLCs living in forested landscapes, helping them live sustainably, while also deterring deforestation and forest degradation. It builds on progress from the 2016-2020 project on securing community rights, by working in new communities in seven existing districts as well as five new districts. An integrated rights and livelihoods approach will be applied in 25 communities.

**Support for COVID-19 recovery and resilience building**

Thanks to support from the Global Greengrants Fund (GGF) and the Ford Foundation Social Bond Fund, we have been able to extend and expand our support for IPLCs, as they struggle to withstand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities. For the first six months of the grant-making period (July to December 2021), we provided institutional support to national and regional organisations in Southeast Asia, supported capacity development for millennial farmers in the Philippines and implemented COVID-19 recovery initiatives among IPLCs in Indonesia.

**Nurturing the next generation of IPLC leaders**

Despite restrictions on travel and gathering, we were able to successfully conduct the IPLC Youth Exchange Summit, or Regional Youth Menoken event in November 2021. The summit involved approximately 350 IPs and local youth, including differently abled (differable) people from 11 regions in Indonesia and seven communities in the Philippines. Through a series of activities held offline and online, participants shared their views on topics including culture, rights, enterprises and livelihoods. The event helped spur the formation of a Manobo tribe unified ancestral domain-level youth group in Southern Bukidnon in the Philippines.

**Menoken activities in Indonesia**

Throughout 2021, seven menoken gatherings took place in Tanah Tabi, Anim Ha in Merauke; Tanah Timor in Nusa Tenggara; and Timur, Sari and Domberai in West Papua. The menoken event with differables, dubbed ‘Secangkir Koppi’, was conducted online, while approximately 840 individuals, representing IPLCs, women, youth and differables, alongside government agencies, local organisations and other activist groups. Topics included local history and culture, food processing, nature and ecotourism, along with various products that communities take pride in, such as coffee, sago, essential oils from citronella and eucalyptus, tenggiri, coconut, virgin coconut oil (VCO), bamboo and ornamental wood processing and products, batik and others.
Recognition and protection in Jayapura, Papua

In Indonesia, the Head of Jayapura Regency, Papua Province, joined “Menoken di Tabi”, a community gathering and knowledge exchange event facilitated by Samdhana in coordination with various other local organisations. He was so inspired that he publicly called for the protection and development of Jayapura and Yotoro Hill. The agrarian reform task force (GTMA) conducted a dialogue with the Indigenous communities of Rhepang Muaf, which confirmed both parties’ determination to pursue recognition and protection of their territory. Moving forward, the GTMA of Jayapura and the local chapter of the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) in Tabi will assist and conduct the tenure rights assessment for Jayapura Regency.

Fork to Farm Dialogues at COP26

IPLC partners also shared their stories about food systems and challenges during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26 side event, organised by the Fork to Farm Network and Nourish Scotland. These local and global dialogues aimed to open up channels of communication among producers, farmers and consumers around a just transition to resilient and low-carbon food systems. Samdhana facilitated three local dialogues in the Philippines and one in Indonesia. The dialogue platforms provided space for IPLCs to get to know the traditional practices and issues that other communities face in their respective environments. They also brought new information and awareness of these topics to a wider audience, particularly those who watched the webinar via social media.

Working SMARTER with local women

In September 2021, we completed a three-year project, supported by the Ford Foundation and entitled Improving the Resilience and Adaptive Capacity of Indigenous and Local Women in Facing Socio-ecological Challenges through Smart Practices (also known as ‘SMARTER’ Project). The project set out to support young people, especially women, in the Waioti and Kolisia B villages in Sikka District, Nusa Tenggara.

Young entrepreneurs underwent training that covered climate adaptive perspectives on agricultural development and technology, including drip water irrigation and productive economics business training. Several partners shared their knowledge and expertise, including the Women and Mining Work Team (TKPT), the Association of Activists for the Protection of Children’s Rights (PAPHA) in Sikka Regency NTI, the Directorate General of Regional Development, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Youth Sub-Directorate; and the Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education and Culture. A Field School Learning Module, compiled by the Jendela Ide Indonesia foundation in Bandung, is being disseminated to promote and protect biodiversity and strengthen the ecosystem of cultural practices of IPLCs through a combination of guidance, protection, development, utilisation of traditional knowledge and technology. This initiative is presented in cooperation with the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and is expected to be implemented nationwide. Support from the Ford Foundation enabled Samdhana to continue our work alongside the Mama Aleta Foundation and Pokja OAT in Mollo. In 2021, Pokja OAT successfully repaired eight traditional houses (lopo) for use by local indigenous youths in their various activities, including tourism initiatives.

Sandhana joins new Global South funding alliance

In 2021, Samdhana became a member of the newly formed Alliance of Southern Funds (Fondos del Sur), which was launched on 9 December 2021. In addition to Samdhana, the Alliance comprises eight other funding organisations from around the world, namely the Casa Socio-environmental Fund (Brazil), Fondo Acción Solidaria (Mexico), Fondo Neque (Ecuador), Tindzila Fund (Mozambique), Fondo Emerger (Colombia), Fundación Semilla (Bolivia), Fundación Tierra Viva (Honduras) and Fondo Socioambiental del Peru (Peru).

Together, these organisations represent independent, locally founded and locally led socio-environmental funds. The nine partners share a common belief that, as a network of local funding organisations, they can collectively influence the philanthropic community; channelling investments towards issues that are relevant to each region; and support of global environmental sustainability. In the months ahead, the Fondos del Sur group will be discussing ways of working through shared experiences, lessons and models in small and direct grants making.

Looking to the future, Sandhana will continue working alongside local and national CSOs to support IPLCs in Southeast Asia through a combination of grants, capacity building, landscape and policy development and support programmes. We anticipate more challenges related to COVID-19 in 2022, particularly with regards to vaccination issues among IPs, but will continue searching for safe ways to work together. We will keep striving to secure tenure for our Indigenous partners, through our work in priority landscape areas like Northern Mindanao and Calamianes in the Philippines and in Tanah Papua in Indonesia; helping them to resist aggressive encroachment into their ancestral lands. We will continue to build partnerships, strengthen regional networks and facilitate greater knowledge exchange with academia. We will continue working to channel support into grassroots organisations, especially IPLC women and youth groups who are taking the lead in their community initiatives. We’ve come a long way in the past year. There remains much to be done and many obstacles on the road ahead. Regardless, we will continue striving forward, together as one.
Samdhana thematic area of work

- Rural livelihoods and green economies
- IPLC natural resource management
- Next-generation leadership development
- Institutional strengthening and governance
- Disability rights
- Climate change action
- Resilience and recovery support (COVID-19)
- Locations of menoken events Indonesia in 2021
INDONESIA GRANTS HIGHLIGHTS: MULTI-YEAR GRANTS

Total grant amounts approved for multi-year projects (US$)
- 2021: 787,581
- 2020: 1,579,698
- 2019: 245,885
- 2018: 1,790,649

Total amount distributed for multi-year grants (to date) (US$)
- 2021: 255,647
- 2020: 567,000
- 2019: 205,634
- 2018: 126,939

SNAPSHOT OF INDONESIA GRANT PROGRAMME

- Total grant managed in 2021 (including multi-year contract): $4,445,921
- Total contract amount issued in 2021 (including multi-year project): $1,827,823
- Total contract amount disbursed in 2021 (including multi-year contract): $1,165,732
- Total amount disbursed in 2021 from grants issued in 2021: $32,465
- Total grants managed in 2021: 90
- Total multi-year contracts issued in 2021: 19
- Total multi-year contracts issued before 2021: 65
- Total contracts issued and completed in 2021: 10

FINANCIAL SITUATION

FY 2021 (Unaudited)

Grants and support
- US$3,543,049

Expenses

Grants making Programme expenses General and administrative
- US$484,541
- US$1,920,387
- US$306,885

Total expenses
- US$2,911,813

Total assets
- US$4,162,606

Liabilities
- US$2,966,147

Unrestricted net assets
- US$869,689

Restricted net assets
- US$1,196,459

Net assets
- US$2,966,147

Total liabilities and net assets
- US$4,162,606

GRANTS TO SAMDHANA:
US$3,543,000

EXPENDITURE:
US$2,911,000

89% 10% 1%

10% 24% 66%

RESTRICTED UNRESTRICTED OTHER INCOME GRANTS MAKING OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION PROGRAMMES: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT, POLICY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT, LIVING LANDS AND SEASCAPES

The Samdhana Institute Annual Report 2021
At the heart of all Samdhana initiatives is a spirit of connectivity, of nurturing relationships between peoples, places and cultures. Following another year of enforced isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this sense of community has become more important – and more pronounced – than ever before.

In 2021, we continued to work closely with groups of IPLCs in Southeast Asia, comprising local food producers, youth leaders, activists and entrepreneurs, among them leaders, women and the youth. Unperturbed by natural disasters, pandemics and environmental degradation, these groups have continued their struggle for independence, agency and recognition of their land rights.

The following collection of stories looks back on recent events, highlighting progress and areas for improvement, while also providing a source of inspiration moving forward.

#YesTheyCan
#nurturinggeneration
Indigenous Youth Groups Taking Action to Protect the Forest

In the Balinese language, Mertajati means ‘true source of life’ and this is the name given to a forest (or ‘alas’) that surrounds Tamblingan Lake in Buleleng Regency; an area that is home to the Dalem Tamblingan Indigenous community (ADT). The Alas Mertajati supports a total of four ADT villages, namely Munduk and Gobleg, along with Gesing Village and Umejero Village, which belong to the districts of Banjar and Busungbiu, respectively.

The forest has been government property ever since the Dutch colonial era. Following independence, it was split into three categories: nature reserves (CA), protected forests and nature tourism parks (TWA). Currently, only part of the Alas Mertajati area and Lake Tamblingan are included in Tamblingan Nature Tourism Park. Although Indigenous Peoples (IP) have guarded the forest for generations, they have never been formally recognised as its custodians.

But times are changing. Since 2019, and with support from the Dedicated Grants Mechanism Indonesia (DGMI), the ADT have been working alongside the Wisnu Foundation to win Customary Forest status for the Alas Mertajati. An application has been submitted to the Ministry of Forestry and Environment that would protect the Mertajati for future generations and grant them official conservator status.

Indeed, it is the next generation of ADT members themselves who are taking the lead, with a group of 10 local youths from various ADT villages volunteering to map the forest as part of the application process. For many, like Kadek Mahardika from Gesing Village, this is their first time in the forest, and an opportunity to get to know the area better. “If I didn’t take part in the mapping, maybe I would never know Alas Mertajati,” he said.

“During the mapping process, ADT youth groups gained a better understanding of their own heritage and customary values, by rediscovering their connection to the forest. “There are broken ties between the ADT community and Alas Mertajati,” explained Tut Santi Adiyana (or Tut San), who works as a farmer in Tamblingan. “That’s why our community, especially the ADT youth, know so little about the forest; [we’ve lost] the connection we inherited from our elders,” he lamented.

Today, most agrarian ADT communities rely on water from Alas Mertajati to irrigate their fields. The forest’s capacity to provide is fully appreciated by Made Sugi, an ADT youth from Gobleg Village whose father is a clove farmer in Tamblingan. However, he insists the forest has more than just a practical importance. “It is a sacred place,” he explains, referring to the many religious sites that are dotted throughout the forest.

Like a growing number of ADT youths, Made is determined to have Alas Mertajati officially recognised by the government and protected by those whose livelihoods (and cultural survival) depend on the fate of the forest. Made, like the growing number of youth activists working to protect the trees, can’t imagine a future without them. As Made himself puts it, “If we don’t preserve the forest, we may as well cut off the source our life.”

“We’ve lost the connection [to the forest] we inherited from our elders.”
- Santi Adiyana, an ADT youth from Tamblingan
Rising in the East: Supporting the Next Generation of Leaders in NTT

On Tuesday, 24 August 2021, menoken activities were held for the first time in Kupang and Tanah Timor in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), Indonesia. In both locations, the events brought together community members, youth groups and local officials, to discuss plans for environmental protection. A key theme was how youths can take the lead, thereby planting the seeds of long-term community-led conservation.

“Facing the threat of environmental damage in the next 50-100 years, the children and youth of Timor today need to be prepared,” said local Regent Korinus Masneno in his opening remarks at the event in Tanah Timor. “They must understand the threat of environmental damage and its impact on life in the future,” he added, before noting that social support networks must also be leveraged for the good of the environment.

With that in mind, menoken activities have set out to nurture the younger generation’s love of nature. One place where this is evident is the Manusak Nature School in Kupang Regency, where children aged 2-5 years have been encouraged to engage with nature, while also learning how and why it must be protected. Here, students learned to plant trees, use water more sustainably and properly care for the land, during menoken events held over three days and attended by around 50 representatives of the local community, including children with disabilities, the Secangkir Kopi literacy community, Film Kupang, the NTT Language Ambassadors, Rumah Mentari, Kopi Kaoem and the Mama Aleta Fund Foundation.

Samdhana has conceived events such as these to build solidarity and pride in traditional knowledge, while also mobilising action for positive causes. “Menoken activities always prioritise friendship,” explains Yahya Ado, the founder of the Beta Solusi Rumah Foundation.

“We focus on getting together, camping, cooking and eating as a group, exchanging stories and knowledge, singing and enjoying cultural arts together,” he added.

The most positive output of the events was the involvement of the young people themselves. Several young champions were identified in each location, who will now take up the challenge of building solidarity through environmentalism in their communities and friendship groups.

Following the menoken activities in Tanah Timor, various youth groups resolved to tackle the issues faced by their communities, including land rights in customary areas, building relationships between differently abled (disabled) groups, preserving and celebrating traditional arts and supporting gender equality and the protection of children throughout Timor and Kupang. Together, and with the support of the Samdhana Institute, these youth groups represent the dawn of a brighter, greener and more united future.

About Noken

“Noken” is a woven fabric that’s common in Papua, Indonesia. Used for knitted bags and other daily handicrafts, the fabric has many applications and great cultural significance; it is a symbol of traditional knowledge, new life, hope and communal spirit.

Inspired by this ubiquitous fabric, the Noken programme has created a strong network of communities, united by a common cause and linked together through various complementary activities (known as menoken). These activities relate to the rights of IPLCs, economic development, sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty and environmental sustainability.
Tastes and Tales: IPLC voices at COP26

“We don’t want to leave barren land and rocks to our children in the future.” This is what Datu Impandingding had to say to fellow Indigenous Peoples during the Fork to Farm (F2F) Dialogue, held in Southern Bukidnon the Philippines, in November 2021. The group was made up of farmers and community members, who shared a common dream that the youth in their communities would learn to love their land and return to sustainable, organic agriculture; picking up the torch of Indigenous farming, to illuminate the next generation.

Organised by Nourish Scotland and its partners and timed to coincide with the 26th annual UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, the F2F Dialogues were a series of local and global meetings, which set out to unite members of food-producing communities from cities and regions around the world in constructive discussion. Topics covered everything from just transitions in food and farming, to tackling the triple threat of climate change, nature loss and nutrition. Together with various partners, local farmer groups and representatives of Indigenous communities, Samdhana participated in the F2F dialogues both at the local and global levels.

These local and global dialogues were for the local dialogues in the Philippines, 13 stories of Indigenous Peoples and a local organic farming group were shared and documented during a three-part webinar series called “Lasa at Kwento no Pamayanang Pilipino.” Each story highlighted traditional food systems like the silipeten of the Calamian Tagbanwa and the sulagad of the Teduray Lambangian tribes; or drew attention to issues such as tenure security, conserving and promoting traditional food sources, discrimination, the role of women, Indigenous knowledge and rituals related to farming and food security in the pandemic era.

The dialogues provided a forum through which IPLCs could explore traditional practices, share their stories and get an insight into the lives of other cultures and communities. Moreover, the Lasa at Kwento webinars reached out to a diverse audience, including government agency representatives and community members. At least seven local food crops and three food systems were shared by a total of 11 Indigenous communities in the dialogues, each of whom shared their stories and initiatives via video link.

In Indonesia, dialogues highlighted the work of local actors in combatting climate change and withstanding the tribulations of the pandemic; this included presentations on urban gardening initiatives, rural community social enterprises and ecology schools. Speakers shared their lessons learned while developing sustainable and self-sufficient food production in rural and urban settings - an indication of the growing trend for healthy foods and improved nutrition in Indonesia.

During the main COP26 event, Samdhana’s partners in Indonesia, Laos and the Philippines took part in global-level discussions with counterparts in Scotland and Kenya, discussing their respective traditional food systems. This “day without speeches” focused attention away from world leaders and onto the producers and consumers of the world’s food. The Southeast Asia contingent comprised seven Indigenous groups, including youth members from the Philippines; a multi-stakeholder group from Indonesia, including a government representative, Indigenous Peoples and local entrepreneurs like Restiawati from the Bogor Blind Coffee Community; and young farmers from a Laos organic farming network.

The Southeast Asian participants were paired with groups from South Africa and Kenya; and with a mixed northern group coming from Scotland, Canada and other parts of Europe who were on-site in Glasgow. Each group discussed their various regions’ local crops and staple foods, along with broader issues of food waste, climate change and other threats to agricultural ecosystems. Speakers shared information and solutions related to food resilience and distribution, employment opportunities, stakeholder collaboration and capacity building; the Kenyan group in particular focused on initiatives designed to lessen the working burden on women.

In spite of various challenges - such as time constraints and language barriers - participants felt satisfied and proud to have been involved in the F2F Global Dialogues. They learned valuable new lessons from information shared by dialogue partners and from the engagement process in general. Through their shared experience, their passion and their willingness to cooperate, those who contributed to the dialogues have opened up new fields of communication; fertile lands of opportunity for the next generation to explore, rooted in the bedrock of traditional knowledge.
Peace and Progress: Menuvu Youths Take the Lead

For many younger members of the Kirenteken Ilantengan Menuvu Indigenous community¹, the Youth Summit held on 21 November 2021 was the first time they had gathered together. Held in the Ancestral Domain CADT 206, in Southern Bukidnon in the Philippines, the event was part of the regional Menoken gatherings, geared towards connecting IPLCs across Southeast Asia. The communities themselves hosted the summit, while Samdhana’s role was to facilitate, coordinate and provide funding support. The ultimate goal of the occasion was for attendees to meet, be inspired, build solidarity and foster a sense of unity.

These aims were met at the summit, through the formation of a youth group representing CADT 206, named Neumpung ne Memenguheu te UKIMTRICO (NMTU). They aim to help resolve internal conflicts within their ancestral domain, and external conflicts with non-IPs, while also supporting tribal youths in rejuvenating and enriching their unique culture. “There is already a big difference in the Manobo youth because we are now more aware and our minds are opened,” said Reah, the newly elected Chairperson of the group.

“I dream to become an inspiration for the youth to prove that we can achieve something more than just farming,” said Reah, when asked about what tomorrow holds for the Menuvu youth, and how events like the Youth Summit are helping to open minds and broaden horizons. “It makes a big difference that I have gained some knowledge about our lawful rights¹ because now I am not afraid to face people in authority; now, as a leader, my ultimate goal is to reclaim our Ancestral Domain.”

The NMTU will serve as the convening body for several other youth groups that have formed recently in CADT 206. With guidance from the Tribal Council, these organisations have received training about their rights; now, with small grants funding from Samdhana, they are implementing projects and bringing their vision into focus. One such youth group in the CADT 206 area has recently built a conservation centre (tulugan) and seedling nursery, to provide a hub for youth meetings, learning sessions and tree planting projects.

¹The Menuvu are part of the Manobo tribe, who inhabit the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. Their origins can be traced back to the earliest Malay settlers who came from the surrounding islands of Southeast Asia.

²During the training, NMTU members learned about the Republic Act 8371 / Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA)

Several other officers in the group share Reah’s conviction and her vision for the future; a dream of peace and progress for their tribe. “My desire is for all Menuvu youth to know their rights as Indigenous Peoples,” explains Japrey, an NMTU Officer. “So that they will not be afraid to communicate with people in authority and will not be oppressed by other people.”

“I dream that one day we will have justice for our ancestral domain.” - Reziel Jean, NMTU Officer

Building the tulugan and establishing the tree nursery was instrumental,” explains Rubin, who represents one of the growing number of IP youth groups in the area. He sees environmental projects and events as a great way to unite the community and educate them about wider issues: “It has been a huge help that there are activities for the youth, because we [can] learn about our rights in the process,” he added.

Encouraged by the work of their peers, guided by their elders and supported by Samdhana, the Menuvu youth groups are determined to harness their potential for the good of their tribe. “As youths, what we can offer is our perseverance in service,” explains Reziel Jean, an NMTU officer and one of many who are determined to gain expertise in self-governance, so they can build the future in their communities. According to Reziel, this change has already begun: “there has been a great change since the youth became more active, productive, and more aware of our sacred culture.”
The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in various ways. Although IPs are sheltered, to an extent, from the health implications of the virus, they are growing increasingly concerned about the effect that pandemic-era restrictions are having on them and their communities. For those living on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, issues of land rights, conflict, education and exploitation have all come to the fore in recent times. Faced by common challenges, IPLCs have come together to find shared solutions. During an online meeting held in November 2021, some of them gathered to tell their stories.

The meeting revealed that IPs who had been working on a daily wage in the city prior to the pandemic, in jobs such as construction workers, labourers and drivers, have returned to their villages when businesses closed due to the pandemic. These communities generally have poor immunity and lack access to healthcare, making them especially vulnerable to COVID-19. To make matters worse, local policies related to a communist armed conflict have sparked massive human rights violations, including red-tagging and killing of environmental defenders or supporters that lead to bakwit (displacements). These tragedies continue to unfold during the lockdowns, while agribusiness plantations, coal plants, dams and mining concessions have also continued creeping into IP territories.

COVID-19 has impacted all members of the community. With schools closed, mothers have taken on the burden of home schooling and cases of depression have been reported among increasingly isolated teenagers. There have even been reports of sexual assault on students who travel alone in search of Internet signal for their classes (in each case, the perpetrators were men from outside the community).

In spite of the myriad problems posed by the pandemic, IPLCs have remained united, determined and resourceful. Many have turned to traditional or herbal medicine to heal the sick, growing organic remedies such as turmeric and citronella. Others have devoted their time and energy to growing food for their neighbours, reviving old customs of gift-giving, charity, respect and obligation, while also communal prayer.

The pandemic has created many new problems for IPLCs in Mindanao, while also highlighting certain vulnerabilities that existed before the virus arrived. Nevertheless, speakers at the meeting believed that disruption caused by COVID-19 could actually pave the way for a recovery programme to address these long-standing issues.

In order to be effective, this plan must be context-based, culturally sensitive, supportive of IP rights and focused on the needs of women and girls. Recovery must begin with needs assessment among the communities themselves, to ensure that interventions are positive, that interactions are respectful of local customs, and that progress is ultimately sustainable.

“Before I was free to go wherever I pleased inside my territory, but now I cannot even visit my other family members because the government does not allow us to travel.” - A member of the Arumanen Menuvu Indigenous group in Northern Mindanao
Youths from Kalimantan and Papua plant trees on Yotoro Hill in Jayapura, Papua. Yotoro is one of the hills surrounding Sentani Lake, where various activities led by Samdhana and the menoken community are helping to support nature conservation.

Photos courtesy of youth menoken participants.