

Programme on access and equitable distribution of biodiversity economic potential in Central America and Dominican Republic (ABS/CCAD-GIZ)

Rescuing traditional knowledge in Rabinal, Guatemala

Implementing biodiversity access and benefit sharing

Background information

Rabinal is a small village located in the Urrán valley in the Department of Baja Verapaz, Guatemala. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in the region, but the production of handicrafts is also an important source of income for many families. Some of Rabinal's handicrafts are associated with native biological resources, making them truly unique. For example, manufacturing items from *morro* is a traditional art form which dates back to colonial times, and so also represents important knowledge, with a long tradition in the region.

Morro is a tree (*Crescentia alata* or *C. kujete*). The artisans use the fruit to make several everyday utensils. Traditional *morro* crafts usually come painted in yellow, red or black. The black colour is obtained from the ash of the Ocote Pine tree (*Pinus spp*), which when applied with fat extracted from an insect, the *nijj* (*Llaveia axin axin Llave*), gives the handicrafts a glossy finish. The layer of fat also protects them from abrasion and makes them water resistant. The art of working the *morro* with the *nijj* is very labourous. Today, less than twenty families in Rabinal produce black *morro* crafts, far fewer than in the past. The traditional knowledge associated with this craft is in danger of becoming lost forever, as younger generations have little interest in carrying on the tradition.

Highlight 1: The art of working the morro with the *nijj* to produce black morro utensils is a tradition passed on from one generation to the next. This art form was shared within the family: between men and women, adults and youth, and every piece is a unique expression of the artist's creativity. Black morro utensils include kitchen implements such as napkin holders, but also decorative items such as earrings and jewelry boxes.

ABS pilot projects: criteria

For a pilot project to qualify as an ABS pilot project, three of the four identified criteria must be present:

1. It uses biological and/or genetic resources.
2. The benefits that come from its use are fair and equitably shared, through integrative participation of local and/or indigenous communities, and/or womens' associations, by means of Prior Informed Consent (PIC) and Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT).
3. The use of biological and/or genetic resources is associated with traditional knowledge.
4. The use of biological and/or genetic resources has a commercial use.



Photo: Left: Nijj insect on Euphorbia tree leaf (*Jathropa curcas*); Right: Morro fruit, nijj on tree leaf, nijj fat and a piece of black morro craft.

The ABS case study

Goal

- Support the art of working the *morro* and the *niij* to keep alive the associated traditional knowledge with it.
- Strengthen and improve the value chain of *morro* handicrafts by locating new markets, as well as identifying additional uses for the raw materials used in their production.

The main actors in Rabinal ABS pilot project are the local artisans that keep the tradition of black *morro* crafts polished with the *niij* fat alive. The aim is to support the artisans and the art of working with *morro*, by making the process more sustainable, by securing a steady supply of the necessary biological resources, improving the value chain, and building capacity and entrepreneurship amongst the artisans, so that the traditional knowledge of using their local biological resources lives on (criteria 1 and 3).

A number of pressing necessities were identified during site-visits and interviews in Rabinal:

- i) that artisans work together under a recognised legal person, positioning themselves to demand a share of potential benefits – via Prior Informed Consent (PIC) and Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT) - that may come with improvements to their business model (criteria 2).
- ii) Securing access to the raw biological resources vital to this craft e.g. *morro* and *niij* (criteria 1).
- iii) Creating synergies with other local actors such as the Municipality, which has committed to support the project and has granted land to function as a botanical garden and bank of germoplasm.
- iv) Improving the value chain and branding, locating new markets, and identifying new uses and sub-products.
- v) Re-cultivation of native species for biotrade, as a parallel cooperation project with the ADAPTATE programme of the GIZ in Guatemala.

Highlight 2: *Morro* utensils are made from biological resources, the majority of which are found in Rabinal and its surroundings. The *niij* (*Llaveia axin axin Llave*) is one example. Only the biggest *niij* insects are selected for extraction of the fat which is applied to the *morro* craft. The fat, as a subproduct, could also have other commercial uses. For example, as furniture laquer and use in other wooden and/or fur crafts.

Today, less than twenty families in Rabinal produce the black *morro* crafts, far fewer than in the past. The traditional knowledge associated with this craft is in danger of being lost forever.

Breaking into new national and regional markets will play a key role in keeping this knowledge alive, and will be an important exercise in exploring how to complement and improve this product's value chain.

Our programme

Provides support to the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic, in implementing initial measures to promote the fair and equitable access to and sharing of benefits -Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) – derived from the sustainable use of genetic and/or biological resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them.

Name of the programme	Equitable and sustainable promotion of the economic potential of biodiversity to implement the Nagoya Protocol (Access and Benefit Sharing – ABS CCAD/ GIZ)
Commissioning Parties	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) – Energy and Climate Fund (EKF)
Region	Central America and Dominican Republic (member states of the Central American Integration System – SICA)
Implementing organisation	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
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