

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. cujete*). 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 *nijj* 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.

Highlight 2: *Morro* utensils are made from biological resources, the majority of which are found in Rabinal and its surroundings. The *nijj* (*Llaveia axin axin Llave*) is one example. Only the biggest *nijj* 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.

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The main actors in Rabinal ABS pilot project were the local artisans that keep the tradition of black *morro* crafts polished with the *nijj* fat alive. The aim was 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 the artisans formed under the juridical personage of "Asociación de Artesanos de Desarrollo Integral Rabinal Achí", so that they can participate and benefit from any improvement they achieve, monetary or non-monetary through Prior and Informed Consent (PIC) and Mutually Agreed Conditions (MAT) (criteria 2);
- ii) the donation of land under the concept of productive use by the Municipality of Rabinal to the "Asociación de Artesanos de Desarrollo Integral Rabinal Achí". This donation turns into reality the first steps towards the implementation of a botanical garden where ecological sustainability can be assured in the provinces of *Morro* and *Nijj*, essential resources so that the traditional knowledge of the crafts of *Morro Negro* can be kept alive;

iii) Between 2014 and 2019 the program supported microenterprise strengthening of the "Asociación de Artesanos de Desarrollo Integral Rabinal Achí". Marketing and product innovation were some of the areas improved and consequently the value chain of *Morro* crafts.

Our programme

From its start in december of 2014 to its end in march of 2019 our Programme provided 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 sustain-able 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)
Comissioning 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
Period	From 12-2014 to 03-2019

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