

BALBALAN GOLD RUSH
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Akin to the Gold Rush, the people of Balbalan particularly the i-Banao took to gold panning in 1984 when a local forager spotted traces of the precious metal along the Saltan River. Little did they we know that there were practically gold nuggets along the river bank. To them, mining was only for Benguet where a lot of Kalingas were working in the mines and the abandoned government owned and operated Batong Buhay Gold Mines. It was considered a discovery though long known to big mining prospectors and companies.

With this discovery, gold panning then started along the river banks and with the use of the “barkis”. The river banks were filled with activity men, women and children alike. People flocked to the area called Gaang and it was not only gold panning but tunnels were dugged. Each clan or group staked mining claims and aside from the i-Banao sub tribes, the i-Balbalan, I-Salegseg and other surrounding sub tribes in Balbalan came in to participate in the small scale mining in the area. This was considered the gold rush or boom for Balbalan that that made a very remarkable shift in the economy.

It was also during these years when Kalinga experienced its most turbulent decade with the rise of insurgency and the peace and order was not conducive for any economic activity for the people. This was at the height of the insurgency problem and the closure of the Batong Buhay Gold Mines partially attributed to the New peoples Army. Father Conrado Balweg, the legendary Kalinga rebel priest who claims his origins from i-Banao sub-tribes was then very active in the area.

With the economic activity being jeopardized by the peace and order problems and coupled with the impending threat of the entry of mining corporations and pending FTAA applications, the I-banao saw the urgent need to protect and safeguard the resources of their ancestral domain both from outsiders and mining corporations. To avert entry from outsiders, the Banao Bodong Association (**BBA**) took upon itself the management, development and control of the small scale mining activities in accordance with existing national laws and regulations and customs and traditions of the I-Banao sub tribes. The administration and management of the mines were in accordance with the policies and

guidelines of the BBA. Foremost among this was the regulation and selective entry of non-I-banao sub tribes.

The BANAQ BODONG ASSOCIATION (BBA)

The BBA is an organization of the I-Banao peace pact holders and all the members of the sub tribes residing within the three barangays of Talalang, Balbalasang and Pantikian with the over-all objective of promoting the general welfare of its constituents. The organization also covers I-Banao members who are residing outside the ancestral domain. Ingrained in its constitution is the vision to perpetuate the ideals of the "Bodong" towards a peaceful and progressive Banao Ancestral Domain. It was a declared policy of the BBA that the natural resources found within the domain shall be protected and utilized by the i-Banao-sub tribes. The i-Banao sub tribes are known to be the most peaceful tribe in the province and in fact were awarded by the Rotary Club as such. They successfully repulsed the entry of the Spanish Colonizers from nearby Abra and Kalinga owes it to them that it was never colonized. by the Spaniards

THE BANAQ ANCESTRAL DOMAIN

The Banao ancestral domain is situated in the western part of Balbalan Municipality bounded on the North by Barangay Mabaca, South by Pasil municipality and on the East by Salegsseg Balbalan proper Sub tribes and on the West Abra. It has an approximate area of two hundred and twenty two square kilometers (222 sq.km) and a population of two thousand and ninety two (2092) as of 1999 census .It also forms part of the declared Balbalasang National Park. Recently it had been a host to significant scientific researches conducted by ----- This is also the headwaters of the Saltan River .A Hall of Famer in the Cordillera for being the Cleanest River in the region.

1. SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATION OF THE SMALL SCALE MINING OPERATIONS

The BBA within the years evolved a system of administration which was geared towards the preservation of the natural wealth of the ancestral domain and the maintenance of peace and order in the area.

A. REGULATION OF THE ENTRY OF OUTSIDERS

The BBA Guidelines and Policies enumerated the panners, workers, peddlers, businessmen, miners who are allowed in the area. The i-Banao

sub tribes are given the priority and preference to engage in mining. There are restrictions as to the entry of non-members of the i-Banao who are from Balbalan and these are called the **PRIVILEGED** barangays. The so called privileged barangays are those surrounding barangays within the municipality of Balbalan who are allowed to mine in the area. There is a certain quota imposed for each privileged barangay. Another privileged and an unwritten policy was the quota allowed for students who come to do gold panning or given a share from the production during vacation time to enable them to earn for their education. .

It will be noted that non-Balbalan sub tribes especially those whom they have forged a peace pact are not allowed in the area for the reason that if the Bodong will be severed or something happens to them within the mine site, the peace and order situation will be disturbed in the mine site. These were from lessons learned during the time of the Batong Buhay Gold Mines where the mining operations were disrupted whenever there was a tribal conflict that arose between two sub-tribes in the mine site.

Visitors were also strictly monitored especially so if they are not from Kalinga. They have to seek permission, state their purpose in visiting the mine site and get their ID from BBA officials before allowed entry. They are given a very limited time to stay in the mine site.

There were certain restrictions and fees imposed as a means to regulate entry of outsiders.

1. . FEES, CLEARANCES AND QUOTA PER PRIVILEGE BARANGAYS –Privilege Barangay are allowed entry to the mine site in limited number of 40 people/individual.
2. I.D System for all workers valid for two years and visitors valid for one week. is imposed before entry to the area.

2. PEACE AND ORDER CONTROL

Total liquor ban is imposed in the area and it interesting to note that the women folk are deputized to enforce it. They are called the “KAPGA’ from the word “kap-kap” and the “CAFGU” .Stiff penalties are imposed for violators .Aside from the liquor ban there are also enumerated offenses with in the mine site with corresponding penalties like the ban on firearm ,gambling and prostitution .. These are also penalized in accordance with customary laws and traditions.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS and PROTECTION

The Banao Sub tribes accounts for much of the remaining forest cover of the municipality and measures are undertaken for the protection of the environment. Cutting of trees, kaingin system, and the use of the chain are but few of the measures that are strictly monitored.

In the processing of the gold, mercury is used and the use of cyanide is strictly prohibited.

4 TUNNELING

Safety measures are also imposed as to the tunnels like:

1 Tunnel Gap – At least maintain a gap of eight (8) meters vertical and fifty (50) meters horizontal.

2. Rising up and sinking of gap should be divided equally.

*Violators of this are punishable by four (4) mos. Suspension of the group.

3. No tunnel is allowed to intercept an existing tunnel. Violator of this is punishable by closure of tunnel.

4. New tunnel must maintain a gap at least 12 meters.

5. Productive tunnel not operated for sometime should not be considered abandoned.

6. Before operating an old tunnel, new operators should seek permission from the previous owner.

7. Before registering a tunnel there must be a group policy to be presented, no group policy, no registration.

8 Before opening a new tunnel, operators should seek permission to BBA authorities.

5. Sale of Tunnels and Camp and Rights

In order to protect the indiscriminate sale of rights to tunnels and to ensure that the rights are not sold to outsiders. The BBA imposes that no sale for the rights is allowed between individuals. If an individual decides to sell the rights of the tunnels, it has to be sold to the BBA who will pay it and in turn assign it to another. This is also true to the camp sites where the BBA appraises the value and buys it from the rights owner.

7. Gold Buying

Before gold buying was monopolized by outsiders who come to the mine site to buy the gold but now the locals have their own finances to do it themselves. It is either that the gold buying is done within the mine site and then sold to the Baguio or n Tabuk. The buying rate is dictated upon by the buyers based on the prevailing prices with the risk getting it out to the capital taken into consideration. The volume of production is hard to determine

(determine if there is a system of monitoring the volume of production)

111. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Aside from the provision in the guidelines for the protection and conservation of the environment, the BBA is in close association with the Local government Unit of Balbalan, Foundation for Philippine Environment are undertaking joint environmental program the area.

Mercury is still the main chemical being used in the production of gold and they still have to update their system of gold production. They are not so much aware of the hazards of mercury.

1V. GENDER AND CHILDREN CONCERNS

In accordance with the customary laws and traditions women and children are not allowed inside the tunnels for safety reasons. This is aside from their belief that it is bad luck for women to get inside the tunnels as the tunnels might crack. They are confined outside the vicinity and work only as panners. They women in the area also do police work to patrol and implement strictly the liquor ban and they are refereed to as "KAPGA"

V. SAFETY, HEALTH and EMERGENCY CARE

The mining areas are inaccessible to transportation and it takes three hours by foot to reach the area. Although it can be considered a barangay itself provisions for emergency care in case of accidents is very much wanting. Requests have been made to the local government unit to put up and emergency station in the area for minor accidents, and emergency health care. There were instances of death that occurred from dynamite, collapsed tunnels and poison gas form the mines. Safety measures and Mine safety is still very much wanting.

V1. Concluding Statements:

The mining operations within the ancestral domain of Banao, Balbalan can be considered as a model of how indigenous peoples evolved a system of development, control and sole management of their own natural resources. This was borne out of the need for self preservation and control with the threats of insurgency and attempts by mining corporations to enter the area. They abide by policies that are self contained in the BBA guidelines independent of local government. They generate their own funds for the cost of administration and management. The extraction, production and processing is done manually and not considered safe and economically productive in relation to the labor input.

It is self declared as a Minahan ng Bayan, as was not formally decreed as one by the Bureau of Mines as one. Initiatives were undertaken towards its formal declaration considering so that it is also within the Balbalasang National Park. An administrative order was issued to suspend all exploration activities within the area anticipatory to its declaration as a Minahan ng Bayan but still has to be enacted. With Kalinga being eyed a destination for mining investment, there is now a growing threat of mining companies taking over. There is an ongoing exploration in the adjacent ancestral domains of Guilayon Tabuk and pending exploration applications for the Buaya and Mabaca ancestral domains. The nearby government owned Batong Buhay Gold Mines is also a top priority for rehabilitation under the present administration.

With the self declaration as a Minahan ng Bayan by the I-Banao sub-tribes, it is hoped this will be respected and not threatened by the present thrust of the government to invite mining investors to the area. Instead it is hoped that technical advances be not the sole monopoly of the big mining corporations but be transferred to the small scale miners to make the production more economically viable and safe.

The small scale mining industry within the ancestral domain of Banao although at sustenance level has allowed them an opportunity to take active participation in the economic management of their own resources. It has provided them food on the table, education for their children, shelter and livelihood. It is now a **CHALLENGE** not for the i-Banao Indigenous peoples but for government to respect their rights as an Indigenous People for the control, management and development of their resources by and for the i-Banao and for the whole Indigenous peoples of the Philippines.

