

<http://www.sunstar.com.ph/baguio/opinion/domoguen-when-caring-person-dreams-people-heritage-product-and-way-life-sustained>

HOME | LOCAL NEWS | BUSINESS | OPINION | SPORTS | FEATURE | LIFESTYLE



Bacolod	Baguio	Cagayan de Oro	Cebu	Davao	Dumaguete
Iloilo	Manila	Pampanga	Pangasinan	Tacloban	Zamboanga

[Home](#) > [Baguio](#) > [Opinion](#)

Domoguen: When a caring person dreams with a people, a heritage product, and a way of life is sustained

Comment  More

Philippines P.T. at \$805

Tax incl. Last Minute Top Deals Hurry to Book While Seats Last!

Honda® Utility ATVs

Four Decades of Perfecting ATVs Built to Work Longer & Harder.

Ads by Google

By [Robert L. Domoguen](#)

[Mountain Light](#)

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

More Sections

Local News
Opinion
Business
Sports
Feature
Lifestyle
Entertainment

WRITING from the USA after reading this column last week, Mary Hensley wanted a paragraph I wrote in this series on heirloom rice corrected as follows: "Just late last year, Eighth Wonder Inc. also paid for the round trip expenses including accommodation and other fees of eight heirloom rice farmers from the Cordillera who attended a weeklong conference organized by the Slow Food Foundation in Italy."

Mary Hensley is a former US Peace Corps volunteer and now President of the Eight Wonder, Inc, a development NGO based in Ulm, Montana, USA. As a development NGO, Eight Wonder, Inc. continues to express Mary's voluntary and civic concern for the development of her previous coverage areas, particularly the uplift of the livelihood of rice terraces farmers. Eighth Wonder Inc is engaged in the training, value chain development and marketing of the Cordillera heirloom rice, in partnership with RICE, Inc, a Filipino NGO.

I must admit, I wrote the offending paragraph out of an impression I did not bother to verify while the passports of the farmer delegates to the Slow Food Foundation Terra Madre in Turin, Italy were being coordinated and processed by both NGOs early last year. I copy here verbatim excerpts of Mary's letter correcting the wrong impression that said paragraph may have created. Mary wrote: "The expenses for Vicky, as Executive Director of RICE, Inc., and 5 farmers (2 from Ifugao, 2 from Kalinga and 1 from MP, were paid for by the Slow Food Foundation in Italy... not by Eighth Wonder, Inc. (Eighth Wonder does not have that kind of money available... unfortunately.)"

The Slow Food Foundation (Italy) pays all the expenses (air, accommodations, food) for all delegates who are coming from developing countries. Slow Food pays only the accommodation and food (but not air fare) for delegates coming from North America/Australia/Europe/Japan.

I was responsible for connecting the Slow Food Foundation (Italy) with the Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project, though I worked for 3 years to get the nomination of the three rice varieties of rice accepted to the Foundation's Ark of Biodiversity. It was because of that listing on the Slow Food Foundation's "Ark of Taste" that the farmers and Vicky were invited to attend the Terra Madre as delegates. Our project may not have much funding, but both Vicky and I work very hard to connect the project to foundations that can fund various activities.

That is the case right now with the two farmers/project coordinators (Rowena Gonnay from Pasil and Jimmy Lingyao from Ifugao) who are currently in India as participants in a development conference on grassroots community development. Rowena is on the keynote panel and Jimmy is on a panel about sustainable traditional agriculture methods. All expenses were paid by the sponsoring foundation in India but the connection to the project was through a researcher from Oxford (UK) who did her master's thesis research in Kalinga on the project. She contacted us through our website and then met with both Vicky and I before we gave her contact information to the project farmers in Pasil, Kalinga. She now works for a foundation in India and suggested farmer participation from our project to the conference organizers in India."

I am really sorry for sustaining a personal misimpression in my column last week on this running commentary series. Mary and Vicky's NGO initiative to promote and develop the potentials of the Cordillera's heirloom rice brought life and hope to our farmers in the rice terraces. They continue to manage extra time and effort on their own for the sake of the Cordillera heirloom Rice Project beneficiaries. A misinterpretation of the intents and purposes of their precious endeavours can be that costly. I comfort myself though with Mary's continuing correspondence with me that reveals a deep commitment and dedication on their part to sustain the vision, goals, roles, functions and commitments that they have covenanted with their partner farmers and their organizations to promote and develop the region's heirloom rice and the rice terraces.

Before the start of the Cordillera Heirloom Rice Project by Eighth Wonder Inc and RICE, Inc., the continued deterioration, neglect and abandonment of the rice terraces in the Cordillera were well documented and brought to the attention of the nation and the world through the country's print and broadcast media outfits and operatives. Efforts on the part of government to respond to identified problems and arrest the sorry state of the rice terraces actually begun during the Marcos Regime until the present. All failed to bring hope and a promise of a better life for farmers engaged in heirloom rice production.

The region actually invested funds to improve the irrigation system of the terraces, introduced and promoted high yielding rice varieties and alternative tourism livelihoods. These interventions did not really address sustainability and cultural sensitivity. They hastened the cutting of trees in the watersheds and the planting of HYVs disrupted the integrity of the whole system of rice terraces farming. Meanwhile, the terraces were being abandoned by the local folks in increasing number.

Why?

Mary and Vicky's responses focused on highlighting the good and real value of heirloom rice, to the people's culture, their environment and relationships in their respective villages and with the outside world. Even their marketing strategy for heirloom rice is carefully done to ensure that farmers will continue to be proud of this heritage product. Following agreed standards of production, milling and processing, it was their venture that started a well rationalized scheme of pricing for the product. They did not also allow farmers to sell all there produce. They were encouraged to sell only a portion, after the farmer has segregated enough for his or her own family needs. The documented impact of this enterprise, showed grateful farmers earning good income and regaining pride in what their product truly represent about them. There were many who also returned back to their villages to reclaim abandoned rice terraces. This and many more, is what happens when a dreamer and caring person lived with a people, dreamed with them and honestly finds ways to uplift their living conditions. Let us talk more on heirloom rice, next week.

Published in the Sun Star Baguio newspaper on February 02, 2011.



Watch Movies From Netflix

Rent The Expendables Today!

NETFLIX FREE TRIAL Click here