

BALBALAN GOLD RUSH.

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Introduction

Akin to the Gold Rush, the people of Balbalan particularly the i-Banao took to gold panning in 1984 when a Bontoc Miner pointed out to us traces of the precious metal along the Saltan River. Little did they know that there were practically gold nuggets along the river bank. To them, mining was only for Benguet where a lot of Kalingas were found working in the mines and the abandoned government owner and operated Batong Buhay Gold Mines. To date, the small mining activities or industry is considered a model of an indigenous people's enterprise which is operated in accordance with customary laws where the tribes actively participate in its economic management for and by the people themselves.

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 of men, women and children alike. 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. It was then the elders decided to do something about it and took the matter to their indigenous organisation, the Banao Bodong Association (BBA) for the management of the small-scale mining activities in accordance with the customary laws and traditions.

The BBA is an organisation of the I-Babao sub-tribe residing within the three barangays of Talalang, Balbalasang and Pantikian comprising the Banao Ancestral Domain. The 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 Salesseg Balbanan proper sub-tribes and on the west Abra. The BBA then established a system of administration for the mining operation which was geared towards the preservation of the natural wealth of the ancestral domain and the maintenance of peace and order in the area. With the consensus of the sub-tribe it came out with the following system of management, regulation and development.

Management and Operation

Panners, Workers, Peddlers, Businessmen and Miners Allowed at the Mine Site

As enumerated in the BBA guidelines, not everybody is allowed within the mine site. This provision is for the protection of I-banao sub-tribes. There were certain restrictions and fees imposed as a means to regulate entry of outsiders.

Fees, Clearances and Quota per Privilege Barangays

Privilege Barangays are allowed entry to the mine site in limited number of 40 people/individuals. As a means of regulation, among non-members of the tribes, outsiders or those who were considered as privileged barangays were required to get certain clearances from the barangay such as the mayors clearance. An I>D> system was also imposed: Privilege Barangay are allowed vending activities in Ga-ang as Peddlers and Ambulant Vendor after receiving a permit fee of P25.00.

Peace and Order Control

In order to maintain peace and order the following rules were strictly enforced.

1. Total ban on entry of intoxicating beverages (drinking, selling). Violators will be penalised.
2. Firearms are not allowed within the mine site. Indiscriminate firing of guns is punishable.
3. Stoning of Camps—Penalty: P500.00 plus replacement or repair of damage.
4. Theft—includes illegal entry to tunnels, camps with the intention of gain without the owner's consent, stealing personal property.
5. Robbery—Forcible entry to tunnel, camps or establishments within the intention of gaining something.
6. Hold-up—coercing an individual to hand over personal belonging or money.
7. Vandalism and wilful damaging of private or public property.
8. Alarms and scandal—Any reprehensive words and deeds that offend public conscience, resounds to the detriment of the feeling of honest person and gives occasion to the neighbours spiritual damage or pain.
9. Slander—includes oral defamation, intriguing against honour and dissemination of false information against an individual or the association.
10. Gambling—strictly prohibited. Penalty: P1 000.00/perpetrator including camp owner.
11. Prohibited drugs includes shabu, cocaine, marijuana, ecstasy and other drugs considered as banned by the government are prohibited within Ga-ang mine site. Violators shall be fined.
12. Manufacturing wine and other intoxicating beverages within the Ga-ang is strictly prohibited.
13. Challenging BBA officials in line of duty considered assault on person of authority.
14. Immorality—immoral activities are strictly prohibited.
 - a. Prostitution—sale of hot meat by women and men.
 - b. Rape—this case is under the jurisdiction of judicial court, however, investigation can be done at the mine site after which result could serve as evidence during decision by the court.
 - c. Pornographic films for public viewing are strictly prohibited.

Environmental Protections

1. Cutting of log gable trees.
2. Illegal cutting.
3. Cutting of Almaziga trees—strictly prohibited.
4. Kaingin system— strictly prohibited outside the logging perimeter allowed the association.

5. Aside from firewood for cooking purposes, lumber for mining purposes and mineral resources, privilege Barangay are not allowed to cut or gather other forest products.
6. Privilege Barangays are allowed to bring up only one (1) chainsaw for cutting lumber for mining purposes only.
7. Reforestation—every camp is obliged to plant at least 5 trees/year within the vicinity.
8. Anybody engage in gold buying activities will not be issued permit unless he owns a retort.
9. Burning forest is strictly prohibited.
10. Use of cyanide is strictly prohibited, however, ban will be lifted at such time that it will be proven that the process of cyanide used for gold recovery is safe for the environment.
11. Putting of wild traps such as balais, tilung, patongkab is strictly prohibited.
12. Illegal fishing.
13. Sanitation value of private property.

Tunnelling

1. Tunnel Gap—at least maintain a gap of 8 m vertical and 50 m horizontal.
2. Rising up and sinking of gap should be divided equally. Violators of this are punishable by 4 months 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 m.
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.

Visitors

1. Visitors seek permission from proper authorities.
2. Visitors for technical advantage and spiritual purposes shall be allowed but should seek proper approval from the BBA authorities.
3. Kabodong is not allowed entry in Ga-ang as a panner.

Privilege Barangays Camp Owners are not allowed to sell their Camps

The BBa will appraise the value of their camp and payment shall be given to them.

Owners of tunnel from privilege Barangays for cause should not sell his tunnel but return it over to the BBA

Economic Impact on the Community

It is without saying the small-scale mining activity has directly benefited th resident of the area. Business activities and opportunities have increased a lot. A lot of students get support themselves through this activity. Through their fees and other

contributions the mining site has thrived and they were able to put up their own barangay halls and build their trails to the mine site. They still have to come up with the tax system to help in the revenue for the local government is generated from the mining activities.

Gold buying is done by the locals themselves and they sell it directly to Baguio or to Tabuk where they are not updated of the prevailing gold prices. They are now trying to coordinate with the possibility of the Central Bank to buy it directly from them.

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 Balaban. 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 aware of the hazards of mercury.

Gender Concerns

In accordance with the customary laws and the traditions women are not allowed inside the tunnels. 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. The women in the area also do police work to patrol and implement strictly the liquor ban and they are refereed to as 'KAPGA' patrol and implement strictly the liquor ban and the y are refereed to as 'KAPGA'.

Safety, Health and Emergency Care

The mining areas are inaccessible to transportation and it takes three hours hiking to reach it. There is no emergency care or provision in case of accidents. They have been trying to ask the local government unit to put up and emergency station in the area for minor accidents, and emergency health care.

Needed Government Interventions

Although the area is popularly known as a Minahan ng Bayan, it was never formally decreed nor was it registered in the Bureau of Mines s one. It is now solely managed by the people themselves particularly their indigenous organisation, the BBA.

Concluding Statements

The small-scale mining operations in the Banao Ancestral Domain can be considered a model as far as indigenous people are concerned. In this area, the policies and rules for the management, development and regulations of the mining activity were made after the consensus of the elders through Banao Bodong Association. The policies are governed by the traditional and customary laws of the area.

It is the mining operation where the indigenous peoples directly and actively participate in the economic management, development and preservation of their natural resources.