

BIOINTENSIVE FARMER FIELD SCHOOL

Written by Ben Brown, *Restoring Coastal Livelihoods - 2012*

During initial assessments for the Restoring Coastal Livelihood program, Bugis men expressed their wish for women to play a larger role in income generation, yet still stay close to home, due to a myriad of daily tasks around the household. Life along the western coast of South Sulawesi had become increasingly tenuous, with vast areas of unproductive fish farms as the main landscape feature, owned by a few local elite and of little economic benefit to the majority of coastal dwellers.

The loss of the mangrove forests resulted in far fewer economic options for villagers in terms of fisheries, timber and non-timber forest products. The impacts of salt water intrusion on rice fields (situated behind the aquaculture ponds), irregular flows of fresh water, from the mainland, disrupted irrigation, and the ever-increasing need for external inputs to provide energy to the entire system present constant challenges, which impact more on the poor, vulnerable and especially women.

HOME GARDENS AS AN ENTRY POINT

Against the background of large-scale coastal resource degradation and inequitable land-ownership, it was recognized that a small-start was needed, to begin to empower community members to tackle large coastal resource management issues.



Go-organic trainer Joko developing bio-intensive beds with the women's group in Lampoko Village, Barru.

Bio-intensive home gardens was initially selected as a field school topic by a pair of women's groups from Barru district. The intention was to learn to use unproductive land, starting with small plots around the settlement, and to raise vegetables to offset the need to purchase vegetables at the market, and potentially to sell to local markets. It would also provide an opportunity to learn how to eliminate the need for external inputs such as industrial fertilizers and pesticides.

Trainers were hired from "Go-organic" a small organization of bio-intensive farmer/trainers who had graduated from the Learning Farm program of Bogor, West Java.

First harvest of organic "kangkung" in Lawallu Village, Barru. Lawallu kangkung is traded, between households, as well as being marketed locally, and as far away as major grocery stores in Makassar and Manado,



The Learning Farm is an educational facility that provides training scholarships to at-risk youth (orphans and street kids) to learn the principles of Bio-intensive farming, yet more importantly to structure their lives around a fulfilling routine. Over the past two years, four learning farm graduates effectively trained 150 coastal villagers from 6 different villages.

The following syllabus is representative of how Bio-intensive Farmer Field School is run inclusive of assessments, gender-sensitization, technical training and future planning:

Wk.	Activity	Wk.	Activity
1	Learning Contract, Setting Objectives	9	garden maintenance (soil conditioning, weeding, mulching)
2	Gender Assessments	10	planting schedules
3	Principles of BI farming, soil ecology	11	estimating yield, seed saving
4	Making solid, & liquid organic fertilizer	12	harvest & post-harvest processing
5	Preparing BI beds	13	marketing options
6	Making Effective micro-organism bacteria solution,	14	review the ABC's of BI farming
7	Seed selection and nursery construction	15	future planning
8	companion planting	16	showcase day

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Biointensive field schools were only a fraction of the 64 coastal field schools run in four districts in the RCL program over a three year period. All of these field schools were piloted and co-facilitated by the lead agricultural extension agent for the Provincial Department of Agriculture (Ketua PPL, BPTPH Tingkat Propinsi), who is also a member of the FIELD Alliance, a Jakarta based NGO who's members are responsible for much of the spread of field schools in Indonesia during since the days of the FAO Community IPM program.

The combination of young, hard-working talented farmer/trainers (from Go-organic) learning and working together with communities was an especially effective combination, as the farmer trainers spent most of their time immersed in the villages, providing continual technical support in-between weekly field school lessons. The involvement of experienced field school trainers from the government, was also critical to provide the special spirit of a field school, which goes beyond technical training, providing continual opportunities for farmer-led research through trials and experiments.



Vegetables from the program alongside organic and “aeroponic” vegetables shipped from Java. Transportation issues are being addressed by increasing volume and diversifying products from other field schools.

SPREADING UP, OUT AND DOWN

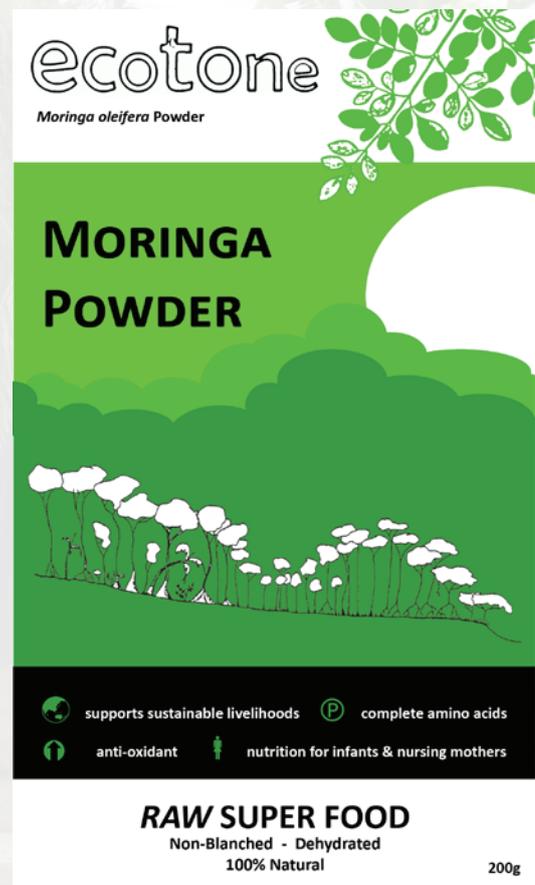
By the end of the first season, many successes were apparent. Vegetable farms were popping up around village houses with regularity, and “lahan tidur” (sleeping lands) were being prepared for expansion. Farmers were harvesting over 20 types of vegetables, including oddities like carrots which “couldn’t grow by the coast before.” Villagers began trading vegetables, and “complaining” that they have never eaten so many vegetables before.

A pair of grocery stores in Makassar (2-3 hours drive away) began to order leafy green with regularity, happy about the high quality and long-shelf life. The entire venture got a boost as the District Leader and his wife began to take interest. The District leaders wife drove down to Makassar to see first hand the vegetables on the shelf at high-end grocery stores, and returned with pride, erecting billboards along the highway promoting the “organic villages.”

At this point, the District of Barru is declaring the sub-

district an “Organic Agriculture Region,” providing support for coastal farmer groups not only for vegetable production, but also staple crops and livestock.

Momentum has grown at the grassroots level as well. During annual sharing sessions between coastal field school alumni of different districts, interest in bio-intensive vegetable farming sprouted new field schools in Tanakeke Island (where fresh vegetables were seldom part of the daily diet, let alone grown locally), as well as a handful of villages in the districts of Maros, Pangkep and Barru. In some cases, women’s groups run the show, assisted by men when preparing the beds. In some villages the groups are mixed, and are also combining with other field school groups who studies salt-water tolerant rice, organic fish farming or large-scale production of organic compost.



As organic vegetable farming becomes a regular part of coastal life, participants are now beginning to tackle larger issues. Vegetable farmers from Lawallu and Lampoko villages in Barru, and Pitusunggu Village in Pangkep are involved in spatial planning at the village level, carving out space for bio-intensive vegetable farming to exist side by side with organic rice and organic fish farms. Women from Barru are also in the process of developing alternate health products from existing resources, such as a “Super-food” powder from *Moringa oleifera* leaves (pictured above).

A renewed understanding of the potential of the village’s resources is evident, spurred on by improved technical skills, but more so by enthusiastic participation by the community, support from government and much greater respect for the role women play in village life and livelihoods.