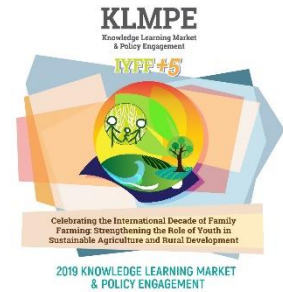


Young Fishers of Cabadbaran City: The Protectors of Mangrove Forests



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BACKGROUND

Mangrove forests are enormously prolific ecosystems that provide several goods and services not only to the environment but to people as well. These ecosystems stabilize coastlines and prevent erosion from waves and storms, provide home and breeding area to a large variety of animals, and protect coral reefs from being smothered in sediment, among others.

Realizing the importance of the mangroves to the coastal communities, the La Union Mangrove Fisherfolk Association, Incorporated (LUMFAI) strongly advocates for the restoration, protection, and conservation of mangrove ecosystem in Cabadbaran City, Agusan del Norte.

LUMFAI is an organization of young fishers that has been engaged in mangrove reforestation projects in Barangay La Union since 2014. Being headed by a dynamic young leader, LUMFAI is firmly guided by their organizational objective of restoring, protecting, and conserving the mangrove ecosystem from danger of extinction due to coastal development and other factors such as climate change, timber poaching, and conversion of land use into agricultural use. In addition, LUMFAI aims to increase coastal protection, food resources, and livelihood diversification while encouraging the youth to join their cause in protecting the environment.

In addition, LUMFAI is a beneficiary of the Fisheries, Coastal Resources and Livelihood (FishCORAL) Project through a mangrove rehabilitation covering two hectares with 6,600 planted propagules as well as a mangrove crab fattening livelihood project.

INNOVATIONS / GOOD PRACTICES

- *Regular meeting and assessment as a strategy of strengthening.* Aside from regular meetings, LUMFAI also conducts activity assessment every time they do mangrove forestation, rehabilitation, and clean-up.
- *Strong environmental advocacy.* With a strong foundation instilled in every member without personal interests, LUMFAI stands firm for the environment, particularly in the protection and preservation of mangrove forest.
- *Strong relationship with the provincial government.* In more than five years, LUMFAI is able to maintain its good relationship with the Provincial Government through the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources (PENRO) in mangrove reforestation activities. With high survival of mangrove propagules planted, the association is always being tapped for mangrove planting.
- *Youth participation in environmental activities.* LUMFAI president Gilbert Badillo said that the youth members are choosing to join mangrove forestation activities instead of doing vices because they view the activities as bonding for the group.

STATUS

LUMFAI successfully made their contribution to their community through mangrove forestation and rehabilitation activities. They were also engaged in mangrove reforestation in the neighboring barangays of Cabinet and Quarry in Cabadbaran, and even in the neighboring municipality of Remedios T. Romualdez. As to date, they were able to plant more than 300,000 mangrove propagules and continuously conducting mangrove area clean-ups in the communities.

More so, LUMFAI has been recognized as a partner implementer of Cabadbaran Mangrove Ecopark for Livelihood, Environment, Aesthetic and Disaster Reduction (CaME-LEAD) Project that aims to make the barangays of La Union and Calibunan an ecopark destination for mangrove forest.

FACILITATING FACTORS / CHALLENGES

Like any organizations, LUMFAI has faced many challenges. One of these was when they lost their hard-earned money from mangrove reforestation projects in a lending venture. At first, the association was earning from this endeavor by strictly implementing their policies but when they became more lenient in executing their rules, the lending venture started to crash. Because of this, LUMFAI learned to be more firm with their policies resulting to a more organized and clever organization.

IMPACT

With more than 300,000 propagules planted by the organization and a strong will to protect the environment, LUMFAI has lobbied for policy development at the barangay level to raise awareness and concerns in regards to securing the mangrove forests. The Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) then taken this to the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* for a legislation, not only for the barangay of La Union but for all other barangays with mangrove forests in Cabadbaran City. Now, the city government has created a *Bantay Kalikasan* and *Bantay Gubat* Taskforce to take the lead in the mangrove and forest protection. The said taskforce, where some LUMFAI members are among the composite members, regularly conducts monitoring of the mangrove and forested areas from the threat of exploitation.

Furthermore, with the awareness of gender sensitivity through the FishCORAL Project, LUMFAI which used to be an all-male organization, was able to invite women to join their group. Now, there are seven women added to the organization and two of those are chosen as the business manager and the bookkeeper of their mangrove crab fattening project. At present, LUMFAI is composed of 22 members in which more than half are youth, seven are women, two are elderly, and one is a person with disability (PWD).

POLICY / PROGRAMME / COOPERATION IMPLICATION

The Caraga State University (CSU) described Barangay La Union as one of the so-called “green belt” areas of Cabadbaran City. This means that the area has a potential for greening program such as re/planting of mangroves that protect the coastal communities from storm surges and devastation from typhoons. With this, the local government in the city and barangay levels of Cabadbaran, the City Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO), the BFAR XIII and the FishCORAL Project, the CSU, and the people’s organizations in the area including LUMFAI have forged an agreement for the CaME-LEAD Project. The collaboration is seen as a venue and tool in attaining and maintaining a sustainable ecopark.