

Creating a model city in sustainable development through community capacity development

I went to Puerto Princesa city of Palawan island of Philippines in February 2013 to conduct research for my PhD through the support of Sylff Research Abroad. The city of Puerto Princesa in the Island Palawan of Philippines is known as the “City in the Forest”. Honorable Mayor Edward Hagedorn initiated several projects to accomplish his vision of “To see Puerto Princesa as model city in sustainable development.” All these projects are given high emphasis to develop community capacity while protecting the environment. The main objective of this study is to identify how creating a model sustainable city through community capacity building has been best practiced in Puerto Princesa city of the island Palawan through selected case studies. I have chosen these case studies in the form of three categories:

1. Alternative livelihood projects

Roxas is the cashew capital of the Philippines and barangay (village) San Miguel is the cashew capital of Roxas. About 90 percent of Philippines cashew supply is provided from island Palawan. Amy is a well renowned cashew processor and now about 14 local villages work under her. She was just a laborer since 90's and now conducting this business in much-organized manner since the introduction of the concept, One Town One Product (OTOP). Ms. Amy said " more than the income I am happy because I am making many people happy through this business"

Amy's cashew processing



In the village Babuyan majority of the housewives are providing pineapple fiber strings, which is the main material needed for weaving. Their children and husbands

support with extracting pineapple leaves and transporting it. About 12 women engaged in weaving and for about a decade this activity has been going on. The participants earn about 200 pesos per day on average and this is a stable income compared to high risky fishing conducted by their husbands. All participants are enjoying and proud about what they do and they feel the ownership and the sense of engagement make them be involved in this project.

Babuyan weaving project



2. Community Based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) projects

The Sabang mangrove paddleboat tour is one of the fascinating attractions of Palawan initiated in 2002. Tour guide who works as the boatmen at the same time, have received 15 day training and every one of them are capable in communicating in English. In 2009 10,000 tourists enjoyed paddleboat tour and in 2010 the number has increased up to 15,000. During the boat tour guides provides various information about mangroves and they show various types. Visitors can enjoy wild life sounds of birds and can see snakes in the branches of mangroves. After the boat tour ends the visitors are welcome to plant mangrove trees as a memory to leave in Sabang. In the fallen branches of mangrove a worm can be found called 'Tamilo'. The tourist can donate and are allowed to try this very healthy local delicacy dipped in lime juice.

Ugong rock Zip line adventure is the most successful project of CBST going on in Puerto Princesa City. Its monthly income exceeds 1.3 million pesos and 44 community members earn about 320 pesos per day. Tourists are guided through out their tour and climb up to the rock. Then they can enjoy a zip line adventure and a memory photo is taken during their zip line ride. Averagely about 4500 tourists come for this adventure every month. Before joining this project community members were slash and burn farmers earlier and about 88 hectares of forest saved annually because they gave up illegal farming and joined this tourism activity.

Ugong Rock adventures



San Carlos floating restaurant is a recently initiated project in 2012 and about 30 community members actively participate in this project. Averagely they earn about 150 pesos per day. They involve as traditional dance performers, boatman and tour guides. Tourists can enjoy buffet lunch with seafood on the boat while enjoying mangrove surrounding distributed in 372 hectares. Sooner they will start crab-fattening projects with the support of the city agricultural office as another alternative income generation activity.

San Carlos floating restaurant



3. Environmental protection projects

"Love Affair with Nature" Mangrove plantation project was launched on February 14, 2003 by planting 2500 mangrove seedlings to two-hectare denuded mangroves of Barabgay San Jose. Mass wedding was introduced and mangrove seedlings serve as a vow material of the newly wedded couple as an added attraction to the project. Legalizing the project aims to institutionalize "Love Affair with Nature Day" and to expand Valentine's Day expression of love from the traditional person-to-person to Mother Nature and as a continuing call to ensure the protection and sustainable use of natural resources. ([Visit this link for more information](#))

"Feast of the Forest" upland tree plantation project was initiated in 1991, staff of the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). This project is a voluntary project and the massive tree-planting activity was launched as finding a solution for the problem of water supply shortage. Annually tree planting takes place in every June. According to city environment office, through out two decades about 2,070,180 trees being planted in 296 hectares of area with a 75 percent of survival rate.

Conclusion

Community capacity development is becoming a serious concern among countries with respect to achieving the goals of sustainable development. This study is more important considering the little attention given to islands in most developing countries, like the Philippines. Puerto Princesa ranging in a land area of 253,982 hectares and boasts about a forest cover of 73 percent with a population of 225,955 (2010). Not only that local community is keen about alternative livelihood opportunities and much aware about sustainable tourism potential to the city while fully committed to protect its own environment. Due to true efforts of the community and reliable leadership, Puerto Princesa city has been declared as the first Carbon Neutral city of ASEAN. Puerto Princesa City is not only carbon neutral, but also significantly a carbon negative city in Philippines.