

Community-managed biodiversity conservation: the SGP-5 experience

“Kung hindi natin ikonserba ang kagubatan, mawawalan tayo ng tubig” (Leonardo O. Mico, President Antutot Forest Management, Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya). This is only one of the testimonies that show important conclusion, lessons, and ways forward from the experiences of the SGP5 implementation. These experiences illustrate different approaches for community-based conservation and development initiatives — some led by indigenous peoples and some by women's groups, some featuring enterprise building and some tourism development, some happening in protected areas and some that involved other management regimes.



Photo 1: Upper Sierra Madre Hub

Regardless of the modality, a common outcome was that SGP-5 partners emerged stronger and more equipped to serve as stewards of the natural resources that mean so much to the welfare of their families and communities. Through the projects, they demonstrated innovations and value adding mechanisms that delivered important improvements to the way that development was being pursued in their respective areas.

It is also important to note that these results were done with the view of achieving landscape- and seascape-level impacts, an approach which is a first for SGP in the Philippines. SGP5 experiences showed that this approach is useful in creating synergies in landscapes and seascapes, leading to reduced threats, improved governance, and more strategic individual efforts. Connecting these small, individual efforts in order to achieve results at scale is a continuing challenge, and insights from the stories told in this book can help point the way.

SGP5 experiences demonstrated the need for conservation initiatives to recognize the dependence of communities on biodiversity and the ecosystem services provided by landscapes and seascapes. People are dependent on natural resources. This means that conservation strategies, especially in developing countries like the Philippines, have to consider that natural resources are to a large extent viewed through a utilization perspective.



Photo 2: Roberto Estopace, President Centralized Farmers Association (CEFA)

Photo 3: Nortehanon Access Center (NAC) Rice Duck Farming

The stories of the grantees involved in developing biodiversity-friendly enterprises show the gains that can be seen from embracing and working with this perspective. The Nortehanon Access Center (NAC) showed how farmers were turned into conservation advocates through the new farming practices they learned and the new enterprise (salted eggs production) spawned by their rice duck/system of rice intensification project. Better ways of planting and marketing abaca turned the people's organization Centralized Farmers Association into savvy entrepreneurs — able to turn a profit in spite of typhoons damaging their crops, and able to serve as buyers/consolidators of abaca harvests for the whole Northern Samar province. Communities in Puerto Princesa City became equipped to welcome increasing numbers of tourists with open arms, earning increased incomes without sacrificing the integrity of the World Heritage Site that is the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park.



Photo 4: Ms. Petronila Tejero of Lakas at Pagkakaisa ng Asosasyon ng San Pedro (LAPAS) Danggit Production

Utilization of water became an important rallying point for promoting forest conservation in Nueva Vizcaya, with some barangays even taking the initiative to declare their own "barangay source water protected areas." Tagbanua people in the Calamianes Group of Islands became more motivated to participate in programs as they recognized the role played by mangrove forests in shielding them from typhoons. The women in particular grew more empowered in skills and decision-making regarding natural resources management, knowing that this is closely linked to their role in sourcing food from the environment in order to feed their families.

SGP5 enabled community groups to access various forms of support and resources that allowed them to perform conservation roles. In a lot of the projects, the ideas, basic skills, and the warm bodies were already present in the communities. The SGP5 projects unlocked and enhanced their potential, allowing them to turn their dreams into reality. This was true in the case of the case of the abaca farmers, seaweed farmers, and many of the other enterprises developed. The SGP5 projects started off with what the communities already knew and had, then introducing value adding improvements to allow them to scale up.

In Puerto Princesa City, a city ordinance already declared community-based sustainable tourism (CBST) as a priority program, but SGP5 support allowed implementation of the necessary steps in the identified sites and they materialized as viable community-managed tourist attractions. The funding support also gave the PPSRNP park management the relative "luxury" to take the considerable time and effort needed to really work with the communities, organizing them and slowly building them up to be capable managers.



Photos 4 & 5: Lato & Asin Demo sites of Palawan State University-Center for Strategic Policy & Governance (PSU-CSPG), Magsaysay, Cuyo, Palawan

Aside from capital, the Programme also facilitated communities' access to expertise. In the Saragpunta project, assistance of experts in completing the requirements for filing the ancestral domain claims were instrumental in bringing the Tagbanua groups closer to their goal of finally securing formal titles to their ancestral domain. The Tagbanua group in Calait Island also found capable allies in Community Centre for Conservation-Philippines (C3) when they needed to conduct extensive negotiations with tourism stakeholders, resulting in a comprehensive set of guidelines for dugong tourism.

Still in the Calamianes islands, members of a people's organization became trained as citizen scientists under the guidance of biologists from the Philippines Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc. In developing biodiversity-friendly enterprises in the Palawan and Northern Samar project areas, introducing the practice of consolidating the communities' products and marketing them wholesale was a game changer for many families, as farmers and producers were able to get more income and benefits from their harvests and products.



Photos 6 & 7: Tagbanwa woman wild yam processing, Busuanga, Palawan

Photo 7: Isla Filomena Snorkelling & Dive Site managed by PO, New Pangganon, Sabang, Puerto Princesa, Palawan

As they improved in capacity, the communities also maximized the impacts of what they had gained. The Center for Empowerment and Resource Development, which served as the Northern Samar hub, reported that the PO grantees they had mentored had become skilled and experienced enough to serve as resource persons to other groups even outside the province. In the NAC project, the 12 farmers that agreed to pilot the rice duck/system or rice intensification farming method became effective spokespersons who convinced other farmers to adopt the practice, bringing the total number of farmer-adaptors to more than 30 with more waiting in the wings. The Kalahan Educational Foundation in Nueva Vizcaya was able to leverage its SGP5 project to mobilize additional support from other institutions, allowing them to scale up the enterprises that they have created.

Creating partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders was an important part of achieving synergistic and institutionalized results. The projects in Northern Samar and Nueva Vizcaya showed that results can be achieved at scale through careful cultivation of working relationships with local governments, national agencies, people's organizations, private entities, and other stakeholders. Indeed, it is noted that in the SGP5 portfolio, the most successful partnerships were facilitated by grantees that had laid extensive groundwork in the sites many years prior. In Nueva Vizcaya, the trust built by the Friends of the Environment for Development and Sustainability (FRENDS) among the different groups and offices in the province played a big part in declaring the Palali-Mamparang Mountain Range Conservation Area and its corresponding multi-stakeholder management council and budgetary allocation.



Photos 8: Teresita Acosta, Executive Director of Friends for the Environment for Developments & Sustainability, Inc. (FRENDs), Nueva Vizcaya

Photo 9: Kalahan Educational Foundation (KEF) Shitake Mushroom Processing, Imugan, Sta. Fe, Nueva Vizcaya

In Northern Samar, the civil society network that was created through SGP5 successfully worked with local governments in advancing policies and mobilizing government funding for conservation efforts. The interactions among the grantees working in the uplands, lowlands, and coastal areas also served to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the impacts of activities happening in the various ecosystems from the ridge to the reef. As such, the Northern Samar story not only showed ecosystems connectivity but also espoused social connectivity. It showcased how the “hub system” developed by SGP5 as a strategy for networking, capacity building, and partnership building was able to create a biodiversity conservation movement in Samar Island.

Skillfully negotiating and balancing conflicting interests paved the way to crafting concrete and lasting changes. This is consistent with the insights listed earlier on the need to acknowledge resource utilization needs and the importance of collaborating with different partners. Conservation initiatives need to balance conflicting interests and other tricky dynamics that may be in play in the sites, whether at the human or ecosystems level. Natural resources management, to a large extent, is essentially people management. This was evident in the work of organizing communities in Puerto Princesa and Calamianes islands in Palawan, where people who were highly dependent on natural resources — sometimes to the point of exploitation — were able to eventually live in harmony conservation goals through tourism or enterprise development.

In the experience of Puerto Princesa, negotiating with private hotels and resort owners resulted in bringing more visitors to the CBST sites. In Calamianes islands, conflicting interests arose even within SGP5 grantees themselves, as seaweed farming posed potential risks to the

dugongs grazing beneath the seaweed lines. Careful negotiations among the grantees as well as the involved communities eventually led to a set of agreed upon courses of action.

In many of these important lessons and insights, what is clear is the important role that SGP5 played in allowing the necessary steps in investing in communities and institutions.

Such investments may come in the form on capacity building, both in terms of technical aspects (community-based monitoring and evaluation system, environmental law enforcement, reforestation, entrepreneurship.) as well as important soft skills (negotiation, conflict management, lobbying). Taking the time to conduct outreach activities also led to recruiting additional local champions, as shown by the work of the Palawan Conservation Corps in promoting youth involvement. Ensuring the involvement of women also proved to be important, as women time and again went on to exhibit skills and dedication that would have gone untapped otherwise. Indeed, there were more women-led POs among the SGP5 grantees and beneficiaries, and they were able to lead their groups towards achieving the kind of successes featured in this book.

Beyond the individual, investing in community building or organizing was also an important part of cementing the success of the conservation initiatives. Establishing PO alliances, such as those done in Nueva Vizcaya (Federation of Palali-Mamparang Conservationists, Inc.) and Puerto Princesa (People's Council) served to facilitate stronger cooperation among these POs, giving them the means to encourage each other continue their work and also giving them a seat at the table along with other decision-makers.

The stories shared in these stories are just examples, and there are many similar stories in the rest of the SGP5 portfolio. Overall, the different initiatives implemented served to build stronger communities and institutions in the SGP5 priority landscapes and seascapes. Through enabling policies, stakeholder collaboration mechanisms, better community practices, and biodiversity-friendly enterprises, SGP-5 fostered growth and built resilience. It helped develop communities that are better able to resist the pressures of poverty and thrive while maintaining a healthy natural resources management mindset. SGP-5 created platforms for achieving sustainable development at the landscape and seascape level. Ultimately, true to the vision of the Small Grants Programme, it achieved community-level results that also make a difference on a global scale.

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