

Baguio City, Philippines

Community driven initiatives on urban biodiversity

The City of Baguio is a popular tourist destination with a pleasant climate and a pristine environment. In response to social and economic impacts of environmental degradation through development, local communities formed since the 1960s organizations, associations and groups to work together towards safeguarding and enhancing urban biodiversity and ecosystem services for their own and the city's benefit. 67 organizations and groups have adopted public parks, street islands and gardens and supporting their development, maintenance and financing. The resulting initiatives have won awards.

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Abstract

The City of Baguio, known as the summer capital of the Philippines, due to its cooler weather, has a climate that allows for a pristine environment and attracts tourism. But the environment has suffered from urban and economic development. In response community-driven initiatives have emerged in Baguio. Local residents have been empowered by participatory decision making and local capacity building; Community control has been enabled over project resources through accountability and transparency.

Participatory community projects illustrate that each individual in the community has a role to play in enhancing and improving the local biodiversity. The communities not only reap social and environmental benefits but derive from the improved local environment also economic benefits, especially the marginalized groups of the city.

The importance of biodiversity

Due to the local climate, many unique flora and fauna can only be found in the city, which contributes to its thriving tourism industry. Baguio was also known for its pine scented air coming from its lush pine forest. But over time, various forms of environmental problems have mounted into unmanageable proportion. Among these are population growth, urban sprawl, deforestation, pervasive and health-impairing pollution, indiscriminate discharging of pollutants into rivers, degradation and erosion of forest lands, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity. These have had a severe impact on the city's natural resources.

Environmental degradation also interacts with climate change so that important ecosystems are significantly affected. One of these ecosystems is biodiversity and its loss. This poses serious implications on human well-being, yet receives little attention at the local level. The increasing dependency of human society on biodiversity and ecosystem services is occurring at a time when biodiversity is suffering a considerable loss. It is estimated that the current global extinction rate is between 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than it would naturally be. This extinction rate poses a great threat for human society, especially to the vulnerable sectors of society.



Population / Land area
~ 252,000 (2000) / 54 km²

Municipal budget
22.2 million US\$ (2008)

Case Study

City context

Baguio, a major urban center north of Manila, is an important employment center for sectors such as education, tourism, health services, finance, and regional government. It is also a melting pot of the Cordillera culture. It is 8 degrees cooler compared to most parts in the Philippines, thus earning its title as the summer capital of the Philippines.

Photo: Victorino Aquitania / ICLEI SEA



Overview of Baguio.

By and by, the flora and fauna of Baguio has been increasingly threatened by population growth, urban sprawl and rapid development. This has resulted in the deterioration of the city's natural environment and natural carbon sinks, as well as having an impact on the communities' well-being.

The adverse environmental changes caused negative impacts on the entire city. This became the trigger that made people organize themselves into community associations, organizations, clubs or groups to help the local government bring environmental improvements to their own communities.

The community as the driving force of change

As early as the 1960's, the City of Baguio built the consciousness of citizens on the need to enhance the natural beauty of the city through the cultivation of flower gardens, planting of trees and other ornamental plants to boost its tourism industry. Owing to the unattractive state of the city's parks in the 1970s, a group of professionals formed the Baguio City Parks Foundation to assist the city government in the development, management and maintenance of the city parks and playgrounds. This has paved the way for the city to declare strips of public lands within the city as reserves for public parks in line with its beautification and cleanliness drive.

Due to the success of the partnership between the city and the Baguio City Parks Foundation, the local government launched the "Adopt-a-Park" project in 1989 to further attract assistance of civic-minded organizations to be directly involved in safeguarding, maintaining and developing parks and gardens in the city. This call has been extended to international partner cities and the private sector of Baguio. Currently, there are 67 organizations and groups that have adopted public parks, street islands and gardens which they are developing, maintaining and financing.

In a similar move, local villages designated portions of public land which should be developed into community parks. Three villages are managing watershed areas within their jurisdiction with the Local Council's approval to protect, maintain and enhance their water resources and biodiversity.

Advocacy as the medium. Advocacy played a major role in several community initiatives. Four major initiatives are illustrative.

EcoWalk. In 1992, a unique program for children was established to preserve and renew the forest of Busol Watershed. The environmental awareness program aimed at developing environmental consciousness through experiential learning and processes to increase the ascribed value to these natural resources. Activities include guided hikes to the watershed, observation tours of the flora and fauna, lectures on the effect of squatting, water logging, resource depletion and climate change, and quizzes on the environment, singing and tree planting. The program resulted in the planting of more than 25,000 trees, which were tended by the same school children and ensured a higher survival rate. The strong volunteerism and initiative of the private sector, local government, NGO's, church and the academia spelled the key success of the program. The program has been awarded the most outstanding best practice on Environmental Protection and Management by the Galing Pook Foundation in 1996.

Clean and Green Program. This program was led by two unique NGOs. The clean element was led by the Alay sa Kalinisan and the green element was led by the Baguio Regreening Movement. These two NGOs were responsible for making the people of Baguio aware of the environmental conditions of the city and how one can help to improve the environment. Local villages concerned about the implications of an unclean and unsuitable environment, mobilized their constituency to clean the surroundings and green their respective open spaces. All villages established village parks and gardens utilizing native plant and tree species. The new green lungs provide breathing spaces and absorb carbon and pollution. They offer an enjoyable and healthy environment. This initiative was declared by the National Government the Hall of Fame Awardee for Cleanest and Greenest City in the Philippines for 3 consecutive years.

The Flower Festival

Panagbenga is in the local language kankana-ey term for "season of blossoming", and is popularly known as the Baguio Flower Festival is a top draw tourism attraction and local economic activity. The festival pays homage to the beautiful flowers for which the city and area is famous for. The flower festival's phenomenal rise to the top of the Philippines fiesta calendar since 1995, is a testimony of the creativity and industry of Baguio residents' show-casing the flora, natural environment and community spirit and the cordilleras cultural heritage of the Cordilleras. The initiative was conceptualized by the private sector (John Hay Poro Point Development Corporation) with support from the local community.

Results and impacts of the project

Awarded achievements. In 2002 The EcoWalk was awarded the Global 500 Laureate Roll of Honour by UNEP in recognition of its outstanding achievement in the protection and improvement of the environment. The program was used by the Asian Institute of Management as a model case study on environment and governance, by the Swedish Government in 1999, 2000 and 2001 in the International watershed Management Course, and by the International Institute on Rural Restoration in water management. More than 50,000 trees were planted and nurtured in Busol Watershed.

Expansion of programs. Owing to the success of the "Adopt-a-Park" program, the city has expanded the program



Green park area in Baguio.

Photo: Victorino Aquitania / ICLEI SEA.

Herbal plants allotment.

Institutionalization of fame and shame. The Clean and Green program has been institutionalized and local villages have regularly allocated funding to the program. To sustain this initiative the City annually recognizes the cleanest Villages and reports the dirtiest villages to the public and media. Moreover, households were encouraged to put up herbal as well as vegetable gardens.

Lessons learned

Recognition and ownership. Local citizens develop a sense of pride when their actions are recognized or shamed when they are reported to the public. Local organizations, groups and advocates are willing to act and provide the financial and human resources as long as their group, organizations or clubs are allowed to plan and implement even with little or no support from the local government.

Improved policy. Baguio City’s biodiversity initiatives, while albeit fragmented, have resulted in significant achievements. The Baguio City Parks Foundation has assisted the city government, through the policy of the city authority, to develop, manage and maintain parks. This has paved the way for more community initiatives in establishing more open spaces and increasing local biodiversity.

Replication

The decentralization and partnerships initiatives can be easily replicated, especially in areas where only minimal resources are needed to mobilize the local people, private sector and civil society. The local government provided an avenue for citizens to engage in service delivery particularly on issues that are close to their hearts.

Advocacy work initiated by the local community has not only increased open space, and improved the management and maintenance of city parks, but has also evolved as an economic activity through showcasing the city's flora and fauna in the annual flower festival.

Recognition and reporting has shown to be an effective mechanism to encourage people to act and be rewarded on their improvements to their environment. The ascribed value of children and adults with respect to the environment has been transformed.

Budget and finances

The local government has no official records on the investments made by local organizations and the private sector. The Flower Festival has a funding of around 333,333 US\$, mostly coming from the profits of the festival itself. The financial resources of the festival are highly depend upon the activities and sponsorship agreements that have been committed by multi-national corporations promoting their products during the festival. The Clean and Green Program on is funded by the Local Government with 12,000 US\$ annually, while the Local Villages have their own budget for the program. The EcoWalk, Adopt-a-Park and other community initiatives were mainly funded through donations, fund raising activities and from corporate funds.

Key Contacts

Cordelia C. Lacsamana
City Environment and Parks
Management Office
City Hall, Baguio
Fax (6374) 442-8931
Tel. (6374) 442-8907
Email: cclpine@yahoo.com

ICLEI Southeast Asia

Secretariat (SEAS)

Units 3 & 4, Manila
Observatory
Ateneo de Manila University,
Loyola Heights 1108
Quezon City, Philippines
Fax +632 / 426-0851
Tel. + 632 / 426-0851
Email: iclei-sea@iclei.org
www.iclei.org/seas

ICLEI Japan Office (JO)

Cosmos Aoyama B2F
5-53-67 Jingumae,
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001,
Japan
Tel. +81-3 / 5464-1906
Fax +81-3 / 3797-1906
Email iclei-japan@iclei.org
www.iclei.org/japan

ICLEI World Secretariat (WS)

Capacity Center
Kaiser-Friedrich Strasse 7
53111 Bonn Germany
Tel. +49-228 / 97 62 99-00
Fax +49-228 / 97 62 99-01
Email: capacity.center@iclei.org
www.iclei.org

Local Action for Biodiversity

The Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) program is a global urban biodiversity program coordinated by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability's Global Biodiversity Centre, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The LAB Pioneer program began in 2006 with a selected group of local and regional authorities from around the world, representing over 54 million citizens. The program provides an accessible and enabling platform for committed, leading local governments from around the world. This is achieved by profiling and promoting the importance of urban biodiversity and the role of local governments in its management, as well as by sharing the experiences, successes and challenges of urban biodiversity management in the participating cities and local authorities.

ICLEI provides guidance in assessment, planning and implementation; strategic networking opportunities; profiling opportunities for the participating local authorities at global and regional events; and creates a platform for local authorities to contribute to global advocacy on biodiversity issues.

www.iclei.org/biodiversity

Sources

- City Budget Office, City Environment Parks and Management Office.

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