



HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UPLANDS

Upper Pulangi, Mindanao,
Philippines



In the uplands of Bukidnon, the youth holds the hope for many indigenous communities. They are the next generation leaders and teachers, next in line in using indigenous knowledge and keeping indigenous values to sustain their culture as they engage with others locally, nationally, and globally. They hold the greatest potential in ensuring social and environmental sustainability and cultural integrity in their ancestral domains. And yet, they are faced with limited options for work and life due to economic poverty and limited education.



This is where an investment in education is thus being pursued because we believe in the youth's promise, in what they can do given the right opportunities and the right learning. The **Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center** and the **Environmental Science for Social Change** are exploring a collaboration with **Jesuit Commons**, an international network of educators from Jesuit universities, to provide educational opportunities to upland youth in Bukidnon. The idea is to deliver contextualized learning for indigenous youth, provide them with life skills, and prepare them for leadership in their communities. One of the strategies is online learning, with Jesuit Commons providing educational expertise and local organizations providing knowledge and insight into the needs and realities of upland youth and communities.



A Multilevel Education Program in place: Culture as context

Educational initiatives in the area respond to the needs of indigenous communities and include an elementary school, recognized by the **Department of Education** (DepED), with an indigenous curriculum and skills and leadership training for upland youth.



The training activities lay the foundation for a broader and more comprehensive higher education program that has two levels: a Senior High School whose accreditation with DepED is being processed and College-level Online Classes to be organized with Jesuit Commons.

Both of these levels are modular in design, offering eight-week courses that develop technical skills such as carpentry and masonry, life skills in finance, communications and relationships, livelihood capacity

in agro-forestry and entrepreneurship, and academic knowledge such as indigenous and Mindanao history. There are also exchange visits and annual gatherings with other indigenous youth from other parts of Mindanao. In this way, the youth learn and draw strength from their cultures, experiences, struggles, and dreams.

The higher education program contributes to the formation of a new generation of indigenous leaders who can lead their communities into a sustainable future with cultural integrity and equity, engage with Mindanao society in such a way that Indigenous Peoples enjoy equal rights and participation, and contribute to a rich dialogue in a multilingual and multicultural society.

A Broadening and Development in progress: Online learning

The current effort is to broaden collaboration and partnerships and lay the basis for the program's sustainability. The development of the Senior High School curriculum is under way. The College-level Online Classes begin with strengthening English capacity to enable students to take courses in English.

This is where we seek to link with **Smart Communications**, who is already providing telecommunications services down the valley, to expand the mobile phone and Wi-fi services so that these can reach the uplands in Bukidnon and make online learning possible for the youth in these areas. The global Jesuit network and the learning resources offered can thus be harnessed to bring education opportunities to marginalized communities.

We invite Smart Communications to be part of this collaboration and contribute to the education of indigenous youth who are grounded in their cultural identity, equipped with technical skills, with strengthened academic knowledge, and who are able to develop and decide sustainable livelihood options. At the same time, these youth are also challenged to be leaders in their communities, caring and managing their ancestral domains, while sustaining their culture, language and identity, living off their land and forest sustainably, and engaging with greater society with confidence and dignity.



Organizations

Environmental Science for Social Change (<http://essc.org.ph/>) is a Jesuit research institute that promotes environmental sustainability and social justice through the integration of scientific methodologies and social process while collaborating across the Asia Pacific region to move an agenda of science for sustainability.

Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (<http://apc.essc.org.ph/>) runs a DepED-recognized elementary school for indigenous children in Bendum, Malaybalay, Bukidnon.

Jesuit Commons (<http://www.jesuitcommons.org/>) is an international network of Jesuit educators whose mission is to foster collaborations across the global Jesuit network that will benefit poor communities.



Environmental Science for Social Change
Luminton Street, Barangay Sumpong
Malaybalay City, Bukidnon
Philippines
Telefax: +63.88.813.2840
Website: <http://essc.org.ph/>