Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

Bendum News

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YOUTH VOICE RISING

From Greta Thunberg's School Strike for Climate that snowballed into thousands of protests around the world to climate conversations and reflections in the uplands initiated by indigenous youth of Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC), youth leadership and energy have pushed climate discussions and action to the urgent consciousness of the world, proving that 2019 indeed is the Year of the Youth. (Photo by Andres Ignacio)

by Gloria Amor Paredes

From the humble beginnings of APC as a basic literacy program for the Pulangiyen community towards an integrated school that offers K-12 basic education today, the acknowledgment that the youth are the future of the gaup (ancestral domain) is always at the core of APC's promotion of culture-based education. As we reflect on what we have done in 2019, it is with the same humility that we celebrate a year filled with a great display of leadership of the Pulangiyen youth.

Globally, there is the increased rise of youth-led movements in demanding climate action, national independence, and anti-gun violence, among others. Specifically for climate action, Greta Thunberg, a teenager from Sweden who sat on the steps of the Swedish parliament in August 2018 demanding climate action instead of going to school, inspired other youth in other parts of the world, and the School Strike for Climate campaign was launched. As a youth-led climate movement, the school strikes for climate mobilized students globally who appealed to governments, corporations, and all responsible adults to take serious and urgent climate action.

The youth of the world responded and millions took to the streets to express their sentiments and messages of solidarity. Despite the disappointments in COP25, a strong youth voice for climate action was heard.

It is worth noting that previously there was Severn Suzuki, a 12-year old girl who spoke on the urgency of climate action before the UN Conference on Environment and Development gathering in 1992, and other youth who later emerged from Africa and the Asia Pacific regions.

In Bendum, the call was not lost despite the lack of social media access that was a major platform for the school strikes. A process of climate conversations that started early in the year further put structure in the climate dialogue with indigenous youth in the uplands, not just in Bendum. And through the tapok or youth summits in previous years, climate change and its local impact on the lives of forest peoples in a drastically altered landscape has been a major topic of discussion. However, with a global movement that spotlights the role of young people, the Pulangiyen youth were more empowered to express their voices as youth and Indigenous Peoples - voices of integrity in the global process of social change.

From 19 to 20 September, a tapok entitled, Pagsalimateng hu lendeng daw gulabung (Awakening for Climate Action) became a meaningful gathering of young leaders across Upper Pulangi. The youth held activities that

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deepened their understanding of how their indigenous culture is critical in mitigating the impacts of climate change. The youth further reflected on the importance of their cultural values in sustaining the attitude of care for the land and water.

The understanding of the environment as something that is integral to their identity was shared with other youth in the other parts of the valley. These are youth who are struggling with their own sense of cultural belonging as their ancestral lands are converted to corporate-controlled farm lands and creating challenges on land and water resource use.

What was unique with this climate action in Bendum was the process that is very much grounded on the tradition of the Pulangiyen people - a tradition that puts emphasis on a peaceful dialogue to settle concerns. During the September tapok, the participants held a dialogue with Malaybalay Mayor Florencio Flores, Jr. APC Gulang (high school) students shared their call for action with the local government and challenged them to do more in addressing the climate crisis, meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and supporting initiatives of Indigenous Peoples in protecting the environment.

To sustain this energy and further accompany the youth, plans to create new spaces for youth engagements are also in the works for next year. This will be possible through new structures that support the vision of the community for a sustainable and holistic education grounded on their cultural integrity.

One of these is the Bamboo Processing, Storage, and Fabrication Facility (PSF), which will be the venue for youth technical training for community youth in Mindanao through the Hulas (training) program. Some of the graduates of the first batch of Hulas training on Bamboo Production, Processing, and Construction are now part of the construction team completing PSF.

By using bamboo that is abundant in the ancestral domain, Hulas youth learn the value of using sustainable materials in construction. These graduates also obtained their TESDA National Certificate on Carpentry and Masonry which is an important document in pursuing just employment. The hope is for the succeeding batches of youth trainees to also be able to obtain National Certificates.

CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

Through climate discussions and reflections throughout the year, APC youth learned how the climate crisis is connected to their culture, livelihood, education, and every other aspect of their life. The following are different statements from some of the youth leaders of climate action in Bendum.

"I am worried because coal-fired power plants are still operating and more are being built. We need to spread awareness on the effect of this and use renewable and clean energy instead." ***Eljoy Linggay, Grade 9***

"We don't have a sense of what is enough. We always want new things: motorbike, cellphone, processed food. Our consumerist nature fuels the climate crisis. We are part of the problem, and we must change it."
Razel Guinton, Grade 12

"When I was in Grade 4, our farm had different crops such as sweet potato, native corn, taro and papaya. That time I knew there was food for my family. But now, vast areas of lands are used for planting GM corn, sugar cane and banana that changed the landscape. We want sustainable livelihood - not concrete roads for big trucks to transport our produce to the global market that we don't even understand." ***Marjohn Linggay, Grade 10***

"The vision of our community is to continue to manage and sustain our ancestral domain as we do now through assisted natural regeneration and natural resource management. I aspire to be a teacher so I can accompany the youth in achieving this vision."
Beverly Sagubang, Grade 11

"People ask us 'Why join the climate action when it doesn't change anything?' Some might lose hope. But we have faith in what we do. This is for everyone's benefit, and above all, for our future." ***Gino Suldahan, Grade 11***

Listen to more of their statements in this video. Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/IPYouthClimate

APC Campus 3: Learning about life

Aside from being a venue for learning from pre-school to grade school (Campus 1) and junior to senior high school (Campus 2), APC also operates a "Campus 3" that serves as a venue for engagement with people from different cultures and backgrounds to learn more about life.

Through different global programs and events such as the University for Peace - Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship (UPeace-APS), Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific (JCAP) Spirituality for Action Workshop, and the *Seeking a New Business Paradigm* field course, APC youth are able to share the wisdom they learn from their land and culture.

"We come from the land. We live on the land. We respect all life that comes from the land. We also learn about caring for the environment. Thus, we hope for recognition of our culture, that our culture will not be erased," Maria Mae Ampohon, Grade 10, shared during an engagement with UPeace students in July.

Although older and with more educational experience, the visitors valued the wisdom of the youth in Bendum as something they need to bring home to their own contexts.

"We went to Bendum to learn about building peace because building peace cannot be attained without environmental management. Lifestyle in the city is different from here. Marginalized groups like the Indigenous Peoples are vulnerable, but their communities and traditional practices are the solution to global problems," UPeace student Hiroshi Takanaka from Japan said.

In August, students engaged with teachers, members of the Jesuit social apostolate, seminarians, and development workers in different non-governmental organizations from across Asia Pacific who participated in the JCAP Spirituality for Action Workshop. They gathered as one community in an *amul-amul* (dialogue), a cultural practice valued by the Pulangiyen as a way of learning from one another.

The youth shared their aspirations and daily joys and struggles in the school, as well as how they contribute in community building by participating in natural resource management and climate action initiatives.

"Seeing how this culture values its youth, how the adults include them in the conversation and acknowledge how the youth can make a difference really made an impact to me," Teriza Mir, a participant from Australia said.

The youth also held a dialogue with students of the Ateneo Graduate School of Business (AGSB) and shared how, as children of farmers, they are affected by land-use change, GM corn farming, and climate change – issues that are impacted by decisions of business owners. They also talked about how in APC, they learn to face these issues through the values of their culture.

This helped the graduate students understand from the ground how businesses impact lives of people in the margins, and how supporting education rooted in the culture fosters community building.

"Culture-based education does not only affect the students. It affects the whole community as well. It gives them a sense of hope for the future," Jenrry Daulo, AGSB student said.

Through these engagements, the community is further accompanied in connecting with broader society, and at the same time, people from outside the culture learn from the wisdom and integrity of the community and their relationship with the land. ◈

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