Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

Bendum News

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Bendum News is a quarterly newsletter of the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC)

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A renewed spirit and energy in 2023

Pedro Walpole

It has been a slow start to the year with all the rain from the Intertropical Convergence Zone, and growth is slow in the garden and for trees planted, but we move on with a good chance of a few thousand seedlings this year. More importantly, the children and youth are now looking forward to an academic break. Part of the Grade 12 program is an internship with ESSC every Thursday, and it is wonderful to see the energy the youth have in helping the school and the community. They are presently reclaiming the old garden of the grade school. The youth are also opening a few plots in the community garden to get further interest going among the different families.

APC is reinvigorating its relations in Upper Pulangi, drawing on the engagements of the past few years. As society returns to a more functional, interactive norm, this is an excellent opportunity to strengthen relations in the area. This entails asking communities how they feel and what their needs are.

One path has already been established with the planning of interconnected trainings and activities across various areas of work. At the moment, APC is helping more than 350 youth in school and another 60 youth in the Alternative Learning Systems programs and on the different work teams, such as the Forest and Water Management Team, the Organic Gardening Team, and the Construction Team.

Much has already begun during the first month of the new year. There are plans to rehabilitate water systems in the four villages where APC connects—Mindagulos, Nabag-o, Nabawang, and Bendum—to improve water infiltration and distribution in the community.

APC's ongoing collaboration with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) allows for the supervision of six to twelve new enrollees in international professional courses for teaching facilitation and four new enrollees in liberal arts studies.

This year, there is a greater focus on developing youth leadership activities and exchanges in BLS through five upcoming Hulas activities.

Another effort is to hold an APC caravan twice a year as a way of reinvigorating communications in Upper Pulangi, sharing the efforts of APC, and fostering a sense of cultural interaction and exchange. This allows us to distribute local language publications in communities where Pinulangiyēn is still spoken.

The stories shared here are all part of this renewed commitment and action.

We are hoping that you will continue to interact with us and that at least some of you will visit. I wish you the best of luck in your efforts and hope you find the support and encouragement you need to build relationships in your *talēgan*, community, and land, as well as care for the life around you.

Mirven Sante reads a water meter as the designated water meter reader of the Bendum Community Water System.

The APC established the community water system to provide reliable and affordable water distribution services to households in the community. Today, the water system service has 25 installed water meters, covering 76 homes in Bendum. The water bills are distributed on the first week of every month after the meters are read on the last day of the previous month.

Every household who availed of the service signed a community agreement on the water distribution charges and payment obligation.

The Bendum Community Water System, with its billing schedule, collection procedures, and community-acknowledged charges, helps to ensure the development and management of the headwaters and the distribution of clean water to the households.

Discovering my place in culture and community: A journey reflection

Maaike Leyens

My Bendum adventure started with my arrival in Manila where I stayed for several days at the university campus and got to know some people involved with APC and ESSC: Andres, Ching, and Julie. Together with some posters in the ESSC office, they created my first impression of Bendum. But since then, a lot of these impressions and feelings about Bendum changed.

When I arrived in Bendum, I had a little shock because of the toilets, after which the excitement of discovering a new place took over. For the first week, I encountered difficulties with the food, personal hygiene, and mosquito bites. By the second week, I overcame the first two difficulties, but I still had to cope with the mosquito bites (and other animal bites). This is how I see the evolution of one part of my experience.

Another part is the volunteer work I did in different APC tasks. I was assigned to the English and the investigation class of Grades 11 and 12 at the APC school. While I enjoyed assisting the English class, I did not feel very useful in the other class most of the time. Where I experienced more usefulness is with the professional course (the Jesuit Worldwide Learning program that APC operates) where I did some tutoring of the learners. My last week was extremely busy as I got involved in setting up the crèche, and I like how things have turned out and I felt useful and busy.

Although I have to say, I also enjoyed my first calm week.

The last part of my experience has to do with my social life. I immediately felt very welcome when I arrived in Bendum. All the children laughed with me and tried to have a conversation. The staff made me feel comfortable and were interested to find out more about me.

But although I felt welcomed, I didn't feel at ease at the beginning as I had to deal with a whole new world: new people, new languages, a new way of living, a new place, a new culture. After a while, I started to connect with some of the children and the local youth, even though there was difficulty in communicating in English.

And for a time, the world of Bendum for me was only Campus 2. Later, I began to learn more and more about the people involved in the Bendum community. Of course, I should stay longer to increase my understanding of this community.

For me, it is interesting to see how the people in the Bendum are striving to educate their children, themselves, and to do work that they like and that enhances their knowledge. This is all done in a sustainable way; the future will have more places, I hope.

I think I should come back in the future to help more and learn more. I also want to come back to enjoy this beautiful place and these beautiful people.

Maaike Leyens is from The Netherlands and stayed in Bendum in February 2023 as a volunteer. She finished her bachelor's degree in anthropology at the University of Utrecht in July 2022 and took a sabbatical year to travel, before starting a master's degree, possibly in environmental and social sciences. She learned about Bendum through her father, Professor Stéphane Leyens at the University of Namur in Belgium, who has visited Bendum in previous work collaboration with ESSC, and Maaike was really enthusiastic about the idea of having such an experience.

Embracing change and diversity in culture and community | Maaike with fellow volunteers and staff at the APC. A warm welcome and making connections with children and staff despite the communication and lifestyle challenges made for a truly transformative visit.

Creche cares for young children: A haven for learning and growth in Bendum

Alma Lumista

On February 17, 2023, APC opened a creche with the registration of students and the orientation of parents led by Arnel and Manuela Santander, and me with the assistance of Maaike Leyens.
A total of 43 students aged six months to four years attended the first day of classes on February 20. Fourteen students were two to four years old, while 29 were between six months and one year old.
With a team of dedicated caregivers, the creche promises to be a safe, nurturing, and stimulating haven for young children to learn and grow.

A challenging first week

When we first opened the creche, the students faced challenges as they adjusted to their new environment. However, during the first week, they quickly adapted to playtime. The children had a wonderful time exploring the variety of toys provided at the creche. By engaging with different toys and activities, children develop their creativity and problem–solving skills, which are essential to their learning.

Positive changes in socialization, hygiene and healthy eating habits

During our third week, we observed significant changes in every child at the creche. We noticed they had become more confident in socializing with their peers and embraced the lessons taught to them. They were eager to participate in class activities and interact with others, displaying excellent social skills. Additionally, they had become more conscious of hygiene practices and routinely washed their hands before and after eating.

We were also delighted to see that most of the children had started to enjoy eating vegetables. It was indeed a great accomplishment!

Finally, we were happy to note that most parents were comfortable leaving their children under the care of the Hulas team. This trust and confidence were a significant milestone for us, and we're happy to be acknowledged as a safe and nurturing environment for their children.

Why the creche is important

A creche center is vital for the development of every child as it provides them with opportunities to learn and engage in various activities from a young age. Equally important is the proper nutrition to support their growth and development. As caregivers, we encourage children to eat vegetables and avoid junk food while instilling the values of self-discipline and personal hygiene. These healthy habits will lay a strong foundation for their overall well-being and enable them to lead healthy and fruitful lives.

Joining hands with Hulas

Hulas is a youth development program that provides training and leadership formation for the youth. Participants in Hulas are young adults who are not in school, and the program allows them to build skills and capacities as they seek better opportunities for their lives and livelihoods.

Our creche center benefits from a team of ten dedicated Hulas members who provide valuable assistance in caring for the children. We discuss strategies for handling and assisting the children at every meeting. The Hulas members also learn how to raise their own children because they married young. As the manager, I assign them specific tasks to maintain an organized and efficient environment while providing the children with loving care.

APC receives citronella processing equipment from LGU Malaybalay for DOST Region X project

APC-Forest, Farm and Leadership in the Margins

The City Government of Malaybalay recently turned over citronella processing equipment to the Forest, Farm, Leadership in the Margins (FFLM) unit of the Agricultural Training Institute of the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC) in Bukidnon. The equipment includes a hydro steam distillation machine, platform digital weighing scale, and drying rack, which will be used for the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Region X's Citro OIL project.

Citronella (*Cymbopogon confertiflorus*) is a type of grass that produces essential oil used in various products, including perfumes, mosquito repellants, soaps, disinfectants, and paints. Despite the Philippines being an agricultural country, it still imports citronella oil for industrial use. The Citro OIL project aims to provide livelihood opportunities for the indigenous community, particularly women, in the Upper Pulangi area of Bukidnon.

APC's FFLM unit has been planting citronella at the forest margins and as boundaries in vegetable farms and pathways. The variety of citronella planted is Java citronella (*Cymbopogon winterianus*), which is rich in geraniol and citronellol, commonly used as a mosquito repellant. The landscape in Bendum, Bukidnon, where the citronella is grown, suits its cultivation, and with regular rainfall, it can survive in poor ultramafic soils that migrants cultivated post-logging.

During the turnover ceremony, Engineer Adrian Gamboa, City Planning and Development Coordinator, expressed his hope that the Pulangiyēn community would benefit from the project. DOST-Bukidnon Provincial Head Ritchie May Guno reminded the group of the project's goal of providing livelihood opportunities for indigenous communities, especially young women, and requested the local government's continuing assistance and support for the project.

APC-FFLM Coordinator Jason Menaling and Operations Head Liza San Mateo expressed their appreciation to the various agencies that assisted. The collaboration between APC, the City Government of Malaybalay, and DOST-Region X aims to create a sustainable source of income for the Pulangiyēn while promoting the cultivation of citronella in the Philippines.

Turnover of the Hydro Steam equipment to APC | The event was attended by **Ms. Ma. Liza San Mateo,** *APC Bukidnon Operation Head*; **Ms. Ritchie Mae L. Guno,** *Bukidnon Provincial Science and Technology Director*; **Executive Assistant Atty. Mitchell Talatala** *from the office of Mayor Pabillaran;* Engr. **Adrian R. Gamboa,** *City Planning and Development Coordinator*; **Mr. Jason Menaling,** *APC-FFLM Project Manager;* **Pedro Walpole,** *APC Executive Director;* **Ms. Emylou Tilanduca,** *representative of the General Services Office;* **Mr. Vic Ian T. Alcontin,** *City Agriculture Office Supervising Agriculturist,* and **Ms. Floredel F. Tinoy,** *CAgO Project Development Section-OIC.*

Setting up the hydro steam equipment | The soil quality, climate, and methods of cultivation are just a few of the variables that affect citronella oil yield. Between 150 and 250 kilograms of citronella oil can be produced annually on a hectare of land used to grow Java citronella. Plant maturity and the method of extraction can also affect the yield of citronella oil. Citronella plants typically mature in 6 to 12 months, and the oil is extracted from the plant's leaves and stems using steam distillation.

A viable option for upland communities | Java citronella is well suited for planting in the uplands because it is a hardy plant that can tolerate different soil conditions and climates. Citronella grass can also be grown in areas with poor soil quality, making it a viable option for upland farmers with limited access to fertile land. This high-value crop can also be grown in small-scale agroforestry systems alongside trees and other crops, promoting biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Ecologial and therapeutic benefits of citronella oil

Citronella oil is a fragrant oil with a strong, fresh, and citrusy aroma due to its high citronellal content. This citronellal compound is also a potent insect repellent, making Java citronella oil ideal for mosquito, tick, and flea-repellent products. Citronella oil also includes other active compounds, such as geraniol, citronellal, and citronellol, which are believed to be responsible for the oil's antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, and mood-enhancing therapeutic properties.

Because of its biologically active and biocidal components, which include camphene, linalool, and limonene, citronella oil is used in many natural insecticides. In agriculture, citronella-based pesticides have beneficial applications on many insect pests, such as mealybugs, borers, moths, and aphids. This potentially reduces the use of chemical insecticides, which can harm both the environment and beneficial insects.

The perennial crop Java Citronella (Cymbopogon winterianus), where the essential oil is distilled, is a hardy plant that can be intercropped with many plants, including timber trees, fruit trees, legumes, medicinal plants, and other aromatic plants. Intercropping promotes soil health, biodiversity, and climate resilience by increasing the water, nutrient, and light use efficiency of plants and naturally suppressing insect pests, soil pathogens, and weeds.

Kids Who Farm: A school microfarm project with APC Bendum

Liza San Mateo

From January to June 2023, APC is one of 12 schools within Mindanao to partner with Kids Who Farm and PLDT-SMART for their School Microfarm Project - an enhanced Gulayan sa Paaralan (GPP) or school garden where new technologies in growing crops are applied.

This project aims to "transfer urban agriculture technologies and agro-enterprise development to partner schools while providing access to healthy food and income generation alternatives." The key technology that will be used for crop production will be the Kratsky hydroponics system; however, APC will adapt this in such a way that bamboo is to be used instead of plastic containers. Kids Who Farm and PLDT-Smart will provide inputs and materials support, training, and mentoring to their partner schools throughout this six-month project.

The centerpiece of this project is the construction of a 30-square-meter GrowHouse, mainly using treated bamboo and UV plastic as protective covering. On January 5, 2023, a group from Kids Who Farm, headed by its founder Muneer Hinay, conducted a site inspection visit at APC Bendum.

The GrowHouse will be constructed in February, and training sessions for container gardening and hydroponics production will take place in March 2023.

Big yields from easy, simple farm tech | The Kids Who Farm team, accompanied by APC representatives, visited the school garden and other possible microfarm sites in Bendum. The Kratsky hydroponic system that will be used is an easy-to-replicate and cost-effective farming technology that can be adopted in other community schools in the uplands.

Discourses on environment and climate justice

Stories of resilience and community-powered solutions toward a safe, clean, and just future for everyone

Pedro Walpole

I was honored to speak about the Pulangiyēn, an Indigenous Community in the uplands of Northern Mindanao and with deep respect, of their elders and their profound relationships with their ancestral domain, the *gaup*.

For generations, the Pulangiyēn have lived in harmony with the forests, cultivating diverse crops and regenerating the forest patch back to *kagulangan*, a practice that is often misunderstood as "slash-and-burn". The traditional practice of *uma* (farm patch) is a humble celebration of life in the forest, and it aligns with the concept of kaing from the North, which means a big basket filled during harvest time. However, due to economic encroachment, traditional families are now forced to grow more monoculture crops and are given minimal economic returns for their labor.

The presentation highlighted four points on how to understand and support the Pulangiyēn and learn from their way of life.

Local climate change in Upper Pulangi

The upland context is experiencing local climate change, resulting in the loss of seasons and difficulty for farmers to adapt their agriculture for local food security. The agroeconomic system is overrun by unjust financial and trading schemes, leaving farmers with only 7% of the financial economy they generate, leading to debt and poverty. Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, and climate justice is needed to address these issues through local compensation, respectful land use policies, disaster preparedness, and forest restoration measures. These issues are shared experiences in different parts of the world, and society needs to take action to address them.

Indigenous People guarding ecological services through culture-based solutions

The indigenous communities view their ancestral lands as a gift and have a deep respect for their environment. They face ecological crises due to land use change, infrastructure expansion and mining, which threaten their livelihood and rights. The true nature-based solutions are culture-based responses, which are rooted in indigenous practices that naturally care for the land, forests, water, and biodiversity. Indigenous youth learn from their elders and the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center about natural resource management, forest regeneration, sustaining clean water, and securing food. The mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MTB-MLE) is integral to the youth's cultural identity and appreciation for traditional knowledge. Abolishing the MTB-MLE for the sole purpose of enhancing a student's capacity to learn the English language better is a betrayal of cultural identity. This is a national challenge for policy frameworks and measures to respond to local needs to ensure the preservation of cultural identity.

Accompanying the youth in identity, self-reflection, and vision

The Upper Pulangi youth find solace in Laudato Si' as it affirms the importance of indigenous communities and traditions. They are taking the lead in natural resource management and forest regeneration efforts in their ancestral domain and striving to better understand their roles in the community. The Bukidnon local government is recognizing the importance of indigenous people in forest and water protection. The youth are now learning English through Jesuit Worldwide Learning programs and participating in global spaces to share their stories and vision for a better future for all.

JWL empowering students to share and engage in global conversations | APC students share their stories and learnings on the youth synodality experience at Balay Laudato Si' during the launch of a booklet detailing their journey of hope, love, and faith amid the contemporary challenges they face.

Global context: A sign of the times

There is a great need to work together and listen to the voices of youth and indigenous people in tackling ecological and social challenges. By organizing social spaces, their voices can be heard in negotiation processes and amplified in calls for change. Also, we need to shift our understanding of the term "environmental preservation" and instead acknowledge the integral way of living with the land and sea by indigenous people and learn from their relationships of care and respect.

This is a summary of the presentation delivered at the 2023 Conference-Workshop on Indigenous Languages and the Sustainable Development Goals: Carrying Out the Global Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda at the University of the Philippines Visayas Iloilo City Campus.

APC-FFLM youth maintain the integrity of the forest and farm lines | Forests play an essential role in agroecology by providing ecosystem services that support sustainable agriculture. Forests provide shade, regulate water flow, prevent soil erosion, and support pollinators, all of which are essential for sustainable and productive agriculture.

Assisted natural regeneration (ANR) work by the youth maintains the forest line which plays a significant role in acting as a buffer zone, protecting the forest from external factors such as erosion and the invasion of exotic species. Maintaining forest edges or lines also sustains biodiversity by providing habitat for wildlife and promoting the dispersal of seed.

APC celebrates school year-end: Preparing the Pulangiyēn youth for engagement in the world

Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center

The Pulangiyēn youth have a deep-rooted relationship with their *gaup*, forests, and traditional farming and forest management practices. However, these practices and the culture constantly face challenges due to the pressures of modernization and globalization. These pressures include rapid deforestation, the conversion of forestland into monoculture plantations, mining activities, and the imposition of Western standards in education and values. All these changes threaten the indigenous way of life and their sustainable relationship with the land.

In this context, the APC provides an alternative approach to learning and education that uses and leverages local culture to teach concepts by providing the learner with the context, integrating cultural crafts, traditional knowledge, and practices in the curriculum.

Over the years, the youth have gained greater self-awareness to sustain the integral relations within the *gaup*, promote intergenerational learning, feel more connected to their community, and take pride in their cultural identity. Most importantly, the youth feel more empowered to take an active role in community leadership.

The APC graduation ceremony is a celebration of life in the forest and of making memories that will last a lifetime. The younger generation is learning more about their culture at APC with a curriculum that uses the mother tongue as the first language to build foundational language skills, learn new concepts, and develop communication skills. Kindergarten through sixth grade students are already studying concepts of land allocation and land use practices. Older students grasp and learn

Sustaining and strengthening the Pulangiyēn identity | Datu Menaling contemplates with joy the young graduates as he shares their sense of accomplishment for completing another school year. Elders hold important knowledge of the *gaup*, about traditional practices, customs, and beliefs. Passing down this knowledge to younger generations ensures that cultural traditions and practices are not lost over time.

A celebration of life in the forest| Filled with hopes and dreams for themselves, their community, and *gaup*, young graduates gather with teachers and guests on stage to mark a significant milestone in their lives as a testament to their hard work and dedication.
Photo from Eric Bruno, Central Mindanao University

about the realities of land productivity, trade, and livelihood.

As the school year ends, APC holds recollection activities to help the youth prepare for engaging in the world as adults. Personal reflection and group recollection have much to do with preparing them for engaging in the world as students or in productive livelihoods contributing to the vision of the community. The recollection activity is done in Balay Laudato Si' as part of APC's program of action. This activity involves a deeper level of engagement with the broader reality that acknowledges the material with deeply relational and spiritual aspects of life.

Resilience and adaptability of the youth| Individual and group reflection foster self-awareness and empower youth as they navigate life's many learning experiences. It is essential to support and acknowledge the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous youth to engage in the world and face the pressures of changing landscapes.

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