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Kalibo mangroves eco-park an environmental marvel

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In Photo: Visitors tour the dense mangrove forest in Bakhawan Eco-Park in New Buswang, Kalibo, Aklan.

KALIBO, Aklan—The Kalibo Bakhawan Eco-Park, a mangrove forest in Kalibo, Aklan, in Western Visayas region, is helping the town mitigate disasters, such as flooding and air pollution.

Medelyn Quadra of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (Penro) said it also balances the ecology of the province.

The exposed roots of mangrove trees.

The 220-hectare mangrove forest in Barangay Old Buswang in Kalibo is rich in biodiversity being a habitat of a variety of species, such as fishes, shellfish, crabs and birds, and help protect the area against natural disasters and siltation, and a nutrient enhancer, among others.

Quadra, in a recent science journalists' forum led by the Department of Science and Technology in Kalibo, said Aklan is rich in mangrove species. The world has 70 mangrove species, while the Philippines has 35 where 26 can be found in Aklan.

Each mangrove tree is an incredible carbon sink, she said.

“It helps minimize air pollution brought about by the transport system in the flourishing tourism industry [by absorbing carbon dioxide],” Quadra, who is in charge of mangrove protection in the province, told the BusinessMirror in a recent interview.

According to the local government of Kalibo, more than 3,000 units of tricycles roam around the town, especially during daytime. The number did not include vans, jeepneys and other transportation modes.

Quadra said the mangrove forest “was cited by the Climate Reality Project [CRP] for [being a best defense] against flooding, especially during supertyphoons.” She was referring to Supertyphoon Yolanda in 2013 that ravaged the Visayas area.

She said, “Kalibo has been protected against flooding and storm surge [or tsunami] by the thick mangrove forests,” which has extended 1 kilometer to the sea.

She added that a Department of Environment Natural Resources (DENR) study revealed that Kalibo is a low-lying area prone to flooding.

A resident earlier said that before the mangrove forest was built in the 1990s, the area had been susceptible to storm surges because it had no barrier—the mangroves.

According to the Outreach web site, mangroves help in mitigating disaster risk and damage, complementing other measures in a coastal-defense strategy. They can reduce storm surge levels by up to half a meter for each kilometer of mangrove that the storm surge passes through. Also, the height of wind and swell waves is reduced by 13 percent to 66 percent within the first 100 meters of mangroves.

Even during “everyday” conditions, when waves may be small, they still contribute to coastal erosion if their energy is not dissipated by a dense tangle of mangrove roots and branches.

Mangroves can help to stabilize sediments, both through their active growth and deposition of organic matter and by capturing sediments.

In earlier interview, Matt Bonns, an American and general manager of CRP, said that through the leadership of the late-Rep. Allen S. Quimpo, the mangrove forest manifested to the world of climate advocates its positive impact on the environment.

In 1990s then-congressman Quimpo partnered with the DENR to turn the then barren land into a mangrove forest. Funds from both international and local government agencies started to pour in.

Quadra told a recent science journalists' forum led by the Department of Science and Technology in Kalibo that P174,000 was the initial investment used in planting mangrove propagules, seedlings and manpower wages.

A group of mangrove planters among the residents of the Barangay Old Buswang has been organized and planted mangrove trees.

The DENR also gave permission to Kalibo Save the Mangrove (Kasama) to manage the mangrove forest for 25 years and renewable every 25 years.

“The Climate Reality Project, founded by former US Vice President Al Gore, recognizes the work of Quimpo and the farmers of the Kalibo Save the Mangrove as the town has been protected from flooding, especially during the onslaught of Super typhoon Yolanda,” Bonns said at the Kalibo Bakhawan Eco-Park on April 15.

On the same occasion, Bonns personally handed to the Quimpo family a leadership green ring—a sign of excellence on environmental protection.

Quimpo also received a posthumous citation from the CRP in a ceremony at the Senate on April 22. Sen. Loren B. Legarda, chairman of Senate committee of environment, handed the plaque.

The conferment of the posthumous award to Quimpo on April 22, the observance of Earth Day, coincided with the start of implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in the Philippines. The agreement, which was adopted in Paris in 2015, had its global implementation on April 22, 2016.

Prior to his death in December 2016 due to liver cancer, Quimpo served as environmental adviser of the CRP-Philippines.

Angelo Quimpo, current president of the Kasama and son of the late congressman, said the eco-park would be renamed as “Congressman Allen Quimpo Bakhawan Park” based on a resolution by the members of the board of directors of the organization.

The young Quimpo said that besides environmental protection, the mangrove forest also contributes to the food security of the residents.

“The mangrove has become a nursery for variety of fishes, shellfish and crabs, among others. As early as 4 a.m., the poor residents of the adjacent barangays come to Bakhawan to fish for free. We had a monitoring personnel there to inspect that their catch is enough for their day to day living. We are strict against overfishing,” Quimpo said.

The mangrove facility also sells charcoal briquette, which are made from the excess cut of mangroves in the area, thereby adding to the income of the residents.

For the benefit of mangrove workers, the Korean International Cooperative Agency, Noryangjin Fisheries Market Cooperative of Seoul, South Korea, and the provincial government of Aklan and Kasama inaugurated a cold-storage facility on June 21.

The cold-storage facility is expected to be operational in 2018 to help maintain the freshness of the fish generated from the mangrove.

“We expect the cold-storage facility to further help Kasama members in their harvest of fish from the mangrove forest,” Angelo said.

Besides the town’s celebration of the Kalibo Ati-Atihan Festival, the Bakhawan Eco-Park is considered a prime tourist destination in the town. It is the pride of Kalibo, Quadra said.

Based on Kasama’s record, the mangrove eco-park had 98,000 visitors in 2016 and 83,000 in 2015. Among its visitors were the Miss Earth candidates who even planted mangrove propagules.

To promote the area and attract more tourists, early this year Kasama partnered with Ariel Abriam, a tourism expert in Boracay. He was behind the success of the Ariel's Point, a cliff-diving destination in Buruanga, Aklan. It should be noted that Kalibo is known as the gateway to Boracay Island, one of the best beaches in the world.

“Abriam is in charge of the tourism promotion of the mangrove forest, while Kasama is in charge of its environmental conservation,” the young Quimpo said.

At least 13 residents have been employed to promote the mangrove as a tourist site and another 13 are in charge of environmental protection. The Kalibo Bakhawan Eco-Park project manifests that with determination and the support of stakeholders it would be an environmental, livelihood and tourism success.

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