

## From Ripples to Rolls of Success



# Restoring the Mangrove Resources in Sibuguey Bay

### Introduction

Kabasalan in faraway Zamboanga Sibugay was once noted for its very high rainfall and wet weather throughout the year; hence, the municipality's name, which old accounts claim came from its Filipino root word "*basa*," or wet. Beyond its obvious association with wet weather, the town is fast solidifying its claim as the province's premier seafood capital as well as a notable ecotourism destination. This resulted from the dedicated efforts of the local government, a driven PO and two NGOs with the vision and determination to make a significant change in the lives of coastal communities. Barangay Concepcion in Kabasalan is at the hub of this amazing transformation: what were once denuded coastal areas and a wide expanse of abandoned fishponds are now healthy, verdant mangrove forests supporting a rich, diverse array of marine and terrestrial life.



A boardwalk was constructed adjacent to the KGMC training center in Brgy. Concepcion so that nature lovers, students, and tourists can appreciate the beauty of a healthy mangrove habitat.

### Synergy at Work

The Xavier Agricultural Extension Services (XAES), an NGO affiliated with the College of Agriculture of the Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro City, has been assisting rural communities in the Zamboanga Peninsula since the late 1980s. Bishop Federico Escaler, a prominent Xavier University official who was assigned to the area, felt that the Peninsula needed urgent assistance because of the many socioeconomic issues affecting the communities, including environmental degradation, illegal fishing and widespread poverty. It has been thirty years since but Nestor Carbonera, XAES Director, remembers this assignment very well. "I was alone, with a tiny office, with no vehicle, but with clear instructions to assist the poor farmers and fishers in the remote areas of the province," he recalled. Slowly, he was able to access support from foreign donors such as the Canada International Development Agency, European NGOs particularly from Germany and the Netherlands, and government line agencies such as the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR).

"XAES was very low-profile at first, but we started making a name for ourselves with the implementation of many small community-based projects," Carbonera noted with pride. "An NGO cannot effect change alone. It needs government support especially in providing counterpart resources," he added.

XAES first crossed paths with the PO, Kapunungan sa Gagmay'ng Mangingisda sa Concepcion (KGMC) in the early 2000s. XAES was then implementing the Western Mindanao Community Initiative Project (WMCIP) of the

DAR, and KGMC was one of the beneficiaries. The Project provided seed capital to community groups to implement livelihood activities. With Php150,000 (US\$3,466) in hand and much optimism to spare, KGMC embarked on grouper (*lapu-lapu*) cage culture and oyster farming. These projects, which continue up to this day, turned out to be very successful. Carbonera noticed from the outset the group's earnestness and determination to succeed and promised the PO that they will continue to work in future projects even after the end of WMCIP.

The fruitful partnership between XAES, PTFCF and KGMC came about when Felix Badon of XAES attended a consultative meeting organized by the FPE. Also in that meeting was Dr. Proserpina Gomez-Roxas, one of FPE's senior officials who is also a trustee of PTFCF. She encouraged Badon to submit a concept paper and project proposal for possible funding by PTFCF. XAES and KGMC saw this as the opportunity to renew their collaboration and work together to save Sibuguey Bay's mangrove resources. In January 2007, XAES became PTFCF's partner in the project, "Rehabilitation and Enhancement of Denuded and Exploited Mangrove Resources" (REDEEM), in Sibuguey Bay.

### A Crucial Intervention

The REDEEM Project could not have come at a better time. Since the mid-1980s, the mangrove forest cover around Sibuguey Bay has been decreasing at an alarming rate. Much of the mangrove forest has been converted

into fishponds, cut illegally for the production of charcoal, for construction, or for coastal settlements. This has resulted in the decline in fish catch from 7-10 kg per fishing trip from a decade ago to only 2 kg. It has also made coastal villages, such as Barangay Concepcion, vulnerable to flooding and storm surges.

With a budget of almost Php2 million, REDEEM focused on three key development areas: (1) enhancement of coastal resources by reforesting a total of 60 ha of mangrove forests in Barangays Concepcion, Nazareth, Makilas, and Buluan; (2) strengthening of four FOs to support efforts in protection, conservation and sustainable utilization of coastal resources; and (3) assistance for sustainable aquaculture interventions for livelihood. The expected long-term benefits of the project were the increase of spawning and feeding grounds for fish and commercially important species, and improvement in income and quality of life of beneficiaries.

Around 374 fisherfolk from four POs in Kabasalan and Ipil were mobilized for REDEEM. Besides KGMC, the other PO beneficiaries were the Makilas Small Fishermen Association (MAKILAS), Barangay Buluan Fisherfolk Organization (BBFO), and the Kapunungan sa mga Gagmay'ng Mangingisda sa Nazareth (KAGAMANA).

### Surpassing Targets

To capacitate the POs, XAES conducted training and workshops on a wide range of topics such as mangrove propagule collection, handling,

Aquaculture-based livelihood assistance, such as KGMC's grouper (*lapu-lapu*) cage farm is one of the key components of the REDEEM project.



Patrolling the mangrove forests is part of REDEEM's many conservation initiatives to safeguard Sibuguey Bay's coastal resources.





planting, and maintenance; community-based resource management; paralegal; and forest and land use. Under the mangrove reforestation component, PO members were paid a peso for each propagule or seedling planted. After a year of implementation, the POs collected and planted 685,000 propagules, seedlings and saplings of various species exceeding the target of 602,900 by around 14 percent, notwithstanding early mortalities. With the number of planting materials surpassed, the area coverage likewise expanded from the target of 60 ha to 71.5 ha.

Under the Project, the four PO-beneficiaries were required to apply for, and secure, Co-Management Agreement Certifications signed by the DENR and the LGUs. These certifications served as recognition of the POs' efforts to secure tenurial rights over reforested areas. KGMC had a huge advantage over the three other POs because they had already been granted a Co-Management Agreement Certification years earlier. By the time the REDEEM Project was underway in 2007, KGMC already had the tenurial

rights to manage 46 ha of mangroves in Brgy. Concepcion. This instrument enabled the PO to plant more mangroves in a bigger area resulting in REDEEM targets being surpassed. This also provided KGMC a 5-percent utilization area where members can sustainably harvest wood for home consumption, such as for firewood and house repair. The remaining 95 percent were retained and protected carefully to serve as a source of planting materials.

As an incentive for their conservation efforts, PTFCF provided each PO with a start-up capital of Php40,000 (US\$924) to implement a livelihood project. Barangays Makilas and Nazareth operated one and two units of fish corral, respectively; Barangay Concepcion was engaged in oyster culture; and Barangay Buluan was provided with a unit of gill net. These projects netted modest profits with the KGMC in Brgy. Concepcion and KAGAMANA in Brgy. Nazareth reporting net incomes of Php21,000 (US\$485) and Php19,194 (US\$443), respectively, in the first few months of operation. More than the monetary rewards, PO members were able to enhance their capacities, one of

With technical assistance from PTFCF, KGMC was successful in establishing multi-species mangrove nurseries.

which was generating funds for their respective organizations.

XAES, as the project grantee, regularly monitored the operations of the four POs, and provided on-site coaching and assistance in the preparation of reports and review of financial records. Director Carbonera knew, based on his experience, that a PO's success depends on how much they are willing to learn.

"There are those [POs] who have very good vision and mission statements but have not done anything. The type of support should be balanced with the capacity of the PO to absorb learning," he explained. "I am happy that of the one hundred barangay-based POs that XAES helped organize, at least 60 percent are still functioning," he added.

While the other three POs were able to meet their REDEEM targets, it was KGMC that performed well beyond expectations. Not only did KGMC plant more mangroves in a bigger area, they were also able to support the three other POs by giving useful livelihood ideas and technical advice especially in setting up mangrove nurseries.

### A Champion with a Challenging Idea

At the heart of KGMC's success is PO President Roberto Ballon, nicknamed Ka Dodoy. He is a slightly-built, affable man in his mid-40s with a quick wit and jovial disposition. Ka Dodoy recounted that as a young boy of 16, his love for the environment began as a member of the local church organization in Kabasalan and was further fueled by participating in

NGO-sponsored training. He and his parents were primarily fishers, migrating from Capiz Province in the 1980s in search of better opportunities – and better fishing grounds – in Mindanao. Ka Dodoy clearly remembered the time when fish and other marine resources were abundant in the area. However, over the years, he saw their catch and that of other fishers dwindle because of illegal fishing and habitat destruction.

Realizing that they had to do something to stop the habitat loss, Dodoy and other KGMC members started planting mangrove propagules along the riverbanks in 1986. "*Pinagtatawanan kami ng ibang tao noon kasi sira daw ang ulo namin at nagtatanim ng bakawan eh marami pa naman daw natitira* [People were laughing at us and called us crazy because there were still dense mangrove forests at that time]," recalled Dodoy with a smile. Members had to shell out their own money for food and gasoline (for their boats) until they were able to plant 50 ha with mangroves. Many members were at first hopeful that they would be compensated for their efforts by the government; however, when this did not happen, the number of volunteers steadily declined. When Dodoy became KGMC Secretary in 1988, there were thirty-six active members; but by 1994, this number has gone down to eighteen, and by 2000, when Dodoy was elected PO President, only three members were still doing volunteer planting work. Dodoy and his loyal members, however, persisted.

As Dodoy explained, "*Ang mga pamilya namin ay sa dagat umaasa upang mabuhay, hindi sa mga pulitiko o sa ibang tao, kaya't dapat lang na una natin itong pangalagaan*

[Our families depend on the sea for our survival, not on politicians or other people, so it is only right that we make its protection our priority].”

**Valuable Education on the Ground**

Having planted mangroves for more than two decades, KGMC has developed practical techniques to increase plant survival. Ka Dodoy recounted, “*Nung una kaming nagtatanim, mataas ang porsyento ng namamatay na propagules ng bakhaw kasi nasisira ng barnacles o ng malakas na alon* [When we first started planting, propagule mortality of the *Rhizophora* species was high because of barnacle infestation and strong waves].” They found out through trial and error that survival will increase if they plant the *bakhaw* propagules on higher intertidal grounds where many abandoned fishponds are located. They have discovered also that mangrove seedlings will grow best in sites where they naturally occur – a fact that, unfortunately, is lost on many agencies that promote planting *bakhaw* in open, wave-exposed portions of the coastline.

The PO members, led by Dodoy, have also developed practical nursery techniques for *pagatpat* (*Sonneratia alba*), *miapi* (*Avicennia marina*) and *bakhaw* (*Rhizophora spp.*), allowing them to use different species in their planting programs. Dodoy is very proud of what his group has accomplished. “*Wala namang nakapag-college sa amin, puro high school lang kami; pero mahilig talaga kaming matuto, dumiskubre at sumubok ng iba’t-ibang paraan* [None of us went to college, all of us just reached

high school; but we love to learn and test new things],” he explained. Indeed, the nursery techniques he developed for *S. alba* have been presented in technical forums and have also been shared with other POs and NGOs. He credits PTFCF for giving very useful technical advice, and providing support for his participation in technical conferences; which further enhanced his curiosity to try new ideas.

Their experience with REDEEM taught the POs that for reforestation projects, it is good to mix species and plant them where they are best suited. Proper site selection is, thus, a very important factor prior to planting to ensure better survival rates of the seedlings or propagules. Also, the occurrence of typhoons and strong wave surges that damaged plantations during the early phase of the project made it necessary for *Rhizophora* propagules to be potted first and raised in a nursery for three to four months (when four to six leaves have appeared) to enable the plants to establish a strong root system prior to transplantation.

The nursery phase is also very crucial for *pagatpat* and *miapi*, which have small seeds and need to be reared in polybags for several months, or when the seedlings have reached a height of at least 12 inches, before they can be used for planting purposes. With the help of PTFCF, KGMC was able to improve on their nursery techniques – from collecting mature seeds (the best time is May-June), seed extraction (using rainwater will increase survival rate), sun-drying for three to four hours to enhance seed germination, sowing in soil beds (best temperature is at 35° C) and potting using polybags, to planting in the project sites.

Poster presented at the 1st Asian Congress on Mangrove Research and Development.

**SEED PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE FOR *Sonneratia alba***  
**BUDUAN, ERIC D. & BALLON, ROBERTO A.**

1. FRUIT COLLECTION  
 2. SEED EXTRACTION  
 3. SUN DRYING  
 4. SEED SOWING  
 5. POTTING  
 6. PLANTING

**KGMC**  
 This strategy was developed by Kapunungan sa Gagmay'ng Mangingisda sa Concepcion (KGMC) in Concepcion, Kabasalan, Zamboanga Sibugay with the guidance and support of Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PTFCF). For details, contact Eric D. Buduan at ebukid@yahoo.com; or visit www.ptfcl.org.

The POs also installed net barriers along the perimeter to protect newly planted seedlings from strong waves, grazing animals and fishers who carelessly trample on the plants while towing their boats. The use of billboards and tarpaulins in the project sites was an effective strategy in informing residents and nearby communities about the project and imparting basic values on coastal resource management and environmental protection.

**Unique Ways in Enforcing the Law**

As previously mentioned, KGMC surpassed their REDEEM targets. Even more remarkable was that on top of the REDEEM Project, the PO was also actively involved in other coastal resource management (CRM) activities in their municipality such as law enforcement. Starting 2007, the Kabalasan LGU has entrusted to KGMC the responsibility of patrolling near shore waters and mangrove forests, giving them not just a patrol boat unit but also appropriating Php500,000 (US\$11,553) each year for *Bantay Dagat* (sea watch) operations. PTFCF’s support included provision of training on paralegal aspects and law enforcement.

Among the clever strategies that Dodoy employed was to put eight Bantay Dagat members in a boat, instructing four of the men to crouch and hide so they will not be visible to illegal fishers and mangrove harvesters. They then slipped out of the boat furtively while the other men made a quick patrol of the area and leave. “*Akala ng mga nag-iiligal umalis na kaya tuloy ang pagputol. Biglang gulat nila may*

Recognizing that law enforcement is crucial in resource management, the Kabasalan LGU has partnered with KGMC in conducting regular patrols to apprehend illegal fishers and mangrove wood cutters.



*Bantay Dagat pala na huhuli sa kanila. Tanong nila agad, pano nangyari yon?* [Violators would go back to mangrove cutting thinking that the boat with the law enforcers had left. They would then be shocked when they see other Bantay Dagat members in the area ready to apprehend them. They would ask themselves, ‘how did that happen?],’ Dodoy said with a laugh.

Violators caught by the Bantay Dagat are brought to the KGMC office, where they are given food and an orientation on basic fishery and forestry laws. When the “friendly” approach does not work and the offense is repeated, gears are impounded and violators are brought to the police. Through KGMC’s law enforcement efforts, all the filter nets in Barangay Concepcion have been dismantled. Filter nets installed in rivers often obstruct navigation and,

because of their fine mesh size, indiscriminately catch immature and juvenile fish.

Kabasalan Vice Mayor Freddie Chu, a three-termer and mayor when the REDEEM Project started in 2007, is proud to have given full, unequivocal support in the fight against illegal fishing and mangrove cutting. “I grew up surrounded by mangroves and I realized that if you cut them, the fish catch and the harvest of shrimps and shells will go down,” he said. “Because of our serious law enforcement efforts, mangrove cutting has been reduced significantly, and the livelihood of people has improved. I don’t think many mayors will do what I did for fear of losing in the elections and because there’s no money to be made. Law enforcement, therefore, becomes a personal crusade of the chief executive,” he added.

### Spreading the Benefits and Opportunities

Following the REDEEM Project’s completion and the POs’ good performance, PTFCF funded a similar twelve-month project in 2008, again in partnership with XAES. This was the Participatory Rehabilitation of Overexploited Mangroves Through Environment-Friendly, Community Driven and Technically Sound Strategies of Sibuguey Bay (PROTECT) Project. This covered a bigger target area – 80 ha spread across four sites in the Municipality of Ipil – with a target of 807,100 mangrove seedlings and propagules planted. Ipil was selected as the priority site because of the alarming condition of its mangrove resources; from roughly 2,500 ha

Roberto Ballon, KGMC President, proudly shows-off the fat lobsters they sell to traders in the Zamboanga Peninsula. He credits the restoration of mangroves for bringing back the rich resources of Sibuguey Bay.



Other follow-up projects to REDEEM and PROTECT were SMILE 1 and 2 that built on the lessons learned and successes of the earlier projects, this time covering several adjacent coastal municipalities of Sibuguey Bay.

of mangroves decades back, the mangrove cover has declined to just 10 percent of its original size. Ipil Mayor Eldwin Alibutdan was a very supportive LGU partner since he has adopted mangrove rehabilitation as his town’s flagship project for food security and climate change adaptation, and has allocated a counterpart fund of Php200,000 (US\$4,621) for PROTECT.

“My town has ten densely populated barangays with people needing to work and eat. The government cannot give them Php100 (US\$2.31) each day for food nor can I give them fish to eat daily. We need to help them protect their primary assets – the sea and its resources,” he pointed out.

Mayor Alibutdan summed up the problem in his municipality. “Mangroves are like a bank and people are withdrawing from this bank without putting anything back. They depend on the sea for their food, money, medicine, and for their children’s education; and so they should have an active role in protecting these resources,” he said. “The population increases but the coastal resources do not. That’s why I am very happy that XAES and PTFCF have been helping us,” he added.

The PROTECT Project was a success based on its accomplishments vis-à-vis its targets. The number of seedlings planted exceeded the target of 807,100; and a total of 175 fishers from the four POs were trained and capacitated on various aspects of CRM to enable them to better manage and protect their resources.

With the success of these two Projects, XAES and PTFCF expanded their sites to include more barangays and adjacent municipalities in subsequent collaborative efforts. Adopting

The PTFCF projects in Sibuguey Bay have been successful in mobilizing womenfolk and youth groups in forest conservation.



basically the same objectives, the two NGOs again partnered for the project, Sustaining the Mangrove Initiatives and Livelihood Enhancement (SMILE), in the municipalities of Ipil, R.T. Lim and Tungawan from May 2010 to May 2011. A follow-up project, SMILE 2, implemented from September 2011 to September 2012, covered new barangays in the three municipalities. Collectively, these projects were able to plant almost 2.4 million mangrove seedlings in 329.4 ha, including abandoned fishponds.

**KGMC Paves the Way**

What about KGMC – the PO that rose above many challenges in its early years and has become a model and an inspiration to other POs? After REDEEM, the KGMC, with the prodding and support of XAES, directly applied for and received a new grant from PTFCF. This

was the Coalition of Fisherfolk Associations for the Restoration of Sibuguey Bay’s Overexploited Mangroves and Natural Resources in Siay, Naga, and Kabasalan, with a cleverly thought out acronym, CARBON-SINK. Basically following the same design as REDEEM but targeting two additional coastal municipalities, the new project progressed to a second phase (2011-2012), expanding to cover Paway and Alicia municipalities. The third phase, CARBON-SINK 3, which will end in 2014, covers all five municipalities.

KGMC, with only a handful of members in the 1980s, now has 320 members, all from Barangay Concepcion. As a matter of policy, all new members must plant from 100 to 500 propagules to instill from the outset a strong affinity with the environment. Ever the creative leader, Ka Dodoy has started a *Pera sa Basura* (Money in Garbage) program in Kabasalan, which encouraged people to join riverbank cleanups, segregate their waste materials and



properly dispose of their garbage. To up the ante, KGMC holds raffle draws every three months, giving the major winners a sack of rice and one bag of groceries. For this program, KGMC has thrice been awarded as Crown Winner by the Health and Nutrition Council of the local Department of Health.

Other accolades have poured in for Ka Dodoy and his group: the 2004-2005 Parangal ng Pangulo sa Natatanging Mangingisda, or Presidential Award for Outstanding Fisherfolk (Fish Culture Category), several Gawad Saka (farming awards) as Outstanding Fisherfolk (Fish Culture Category) of the Department of Agriculture, Most Outstanding Organization Leader by the Ateneo de Zamboanga School of Medicine and Most Outstanding Fisherfolk Citizen by the Prudential Bank of the Philippines, among many others.

Meanwhile, Concepcion Durables, Inc. through its partnership with PTFCF, has identified mangrove restoration in Zamboanga

Sibugay as its key corporate social responsibility program and has tapped KGMC to spearhead reforestation efforts in the province. Since 2008, the company, led by its President Ton Concepcion, has held the annual Condura Skyway Marathon to create awareness for its environmental platforms. In 2012 and 2013, the advocacy focused on mangrove protection; hence the Marathon theme, Run for the Mangroves. Over a million pesos (around US\$23,100) has been turned over by Condura to KGMC to reforest at least 20 ha of denuded forests of Sibugay and revert back abandoned fishponds to their original mangrove state.

**Hard Work and Persistence Pay Big Rewards**

Six years after PTFCF and XAES first partnered to rescue the mangroves of Sibuguey Bay, many positive impacts have emerged. The mangrove forest cover of the Bay has dramatically increased and the trees planted in 2007 have started bearing fruit. Mangrove and associated wildlife such as wild ducks, herons and monkeys, have returned and so have groupers, snappers, shrimps and even lobsters. Kabasalan beneficiaries reported that their fish catch has improved from 1.5 kg to 6 kg per fishing trip, and their fishing hours have gone down from eight hours to three to five hours per trip. Members are now able to buy boat engines and simple household appliances, and send their children to school.

Mayor Alibutdan credits the PTFCF projects for bringing back the fish resources of Ipil. “Our fishers can attest that their catch has

increased from 2-3 kg per day to 5-10 kg per day. My constituents require 2,000 kg to 2,500 kg of fish daily for their consumption, and I am glad that the project has helped me address that,” he said. He also noticed that with the increased mangrove cover, the impact of storm surges and the incidence of flooding in his town have been reduced.

### Spreading the Ripples of Success

KGMC has expanded its mangrove reforestation efforts not just in Kabasalan but in nearby municipalities as well, under the PTFCF-funded CARBON SINK 3 Project. The group has started promoting bamboo planting under the same project to reduce mangrove cutting and provide an alternative for mangrove wood, which is used traditionally as poles and timber for fish drying and oyster culture.

A priority activity of KGMC is assisting Muslim communities – including former members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – in Ipil and nearby municipalities organize themselves into POs so they can participate in mangrove reforestation, coastal conservation and livelihood projects. There are still hundreds of hectares of abandoned fishponds in Sibuguey Bay that the group is eager to rehabilitate with the help of other stakeholders.

The grouper culture project that the PO started in 2008 has grown to a commercial-scale enterprise expanding from a 12-cage module to an 800-cage flourishing business. Because of their strict protection and successful planting

programs, there is an abundant supply of wild grouper juveniles to be stocked in the cages. In 2011, the PO received a Php3 million (US\$69,319) grant from the USAID’s Growth with Equity in Mindanao. The money was used to build a spacious concrete venue that will be used for PO trainings and meetings.

Ka Dodoy is excited about their new venture: the Sea Palace, a picnic/meeting area where tourists can relax and enjoy the seafood after strolling through the mangrove ecopark. Asked why they chose the name Sea Palace when the structure is closer to the river than the open sea, Ka Dodoy merrily replied: “That’s because our specialties will be *sea-nugba* (grilled seafood), *sea-nabawan* (seafood in broth) and *sea-si* (oysters)!”

With growing recognition and offers of partnership coming their way, Dodoy sums up their advantage over other POs: “*Ang importante kasi ang track record. Yung ibang grupo meron lang track, yung iba naman record lang. Kami siguro parehong meron!* [The important thing is track record. Some groups only have ‘track,’ others only have ‘record.’ KGMC I believe has both!]”

There are still many environmental issues to address – mangrove cutting, for one, still continues albeit on a reduced scale. However, with strong partnerships established, and with the support of dedicated NGOs and communities now actively involved in conservation efforts, things are indeed looking good not just for Brgy. Concepcion in Kabasalan, but for the rest of Sibuguey Bay.

The Upper Pangi Fisherfolk Organization based in the town of Ipil is one of PTFCF’s beneficiaries under the SMIE project.



**Perspective :** Vice Mayor Freddie Chu, Kabasalan Municipality

Freddie Chu was Kabasalan mayor when the REDEEM project started in 2007. He gives full credit to KGMC for being a very active and vigilant partner in the crusade to protect the coastal environment. The PO, he said “has become an extension of the LGU” that a big chunk of the annual allocation for fisheries of Php1.2 million (US\$27,727) is downloaded directly to the PO to be used for law enforcement, coastal conservation and livelihood projects.

Vice Mayor Chu is proud to say that he is one of a few LGUs that battled these problems head-on regardless of the threats, offers of bribes by illegal businesses and possible loss of votes

come election time. “I was willing to die for my principles,” he disclosed, recalling those trying times when the odds tilted heavily against his favor. “I grew up surrounded by mangroves, and I knew as a young boy how important these mangroves were as a source of food for the people,” he explained.

With plentiful marine resources and a huge mangrove ecopark that is sure to lure nature lovers, Vice Mayor Chu is excited about his new dream project: making Kabasalan a must-see tourist destination. He also has big plans for Barangay Concepcion – such as building concrete roads, sanitary facilities and a gym to hold social events – as an incentive for the cooperation that the people have given, and are still giving, to the LGU in support of its environmental crusade.