

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS SAVE BIODIVERSITY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Mindanao, in the southern Philippines, is the country's second largest island and is also arguably the country's most diverse in both culture and biodiversity.

On the flanks of the Philippines highest mountain, an isolated community is taking extraordinary steps to take charge of both their community and environment's future. Rising to 3000m Mt. Apo boasts some of the highest land-based biodiversity in the country. It is home to the critically endangered Philippines's monkey-eating eagle, and many other endangered species. The Philippines eagle is one of the world's largest with less than 500 remaining in the wild.

Mt. Apo National Park was declared a national park in 1936, but has received little enforcement. In 2004, the Manobo Tribe was issued a Certificate of Ancestral Domain acknowledging their traditional territory. Sitio Malumpini of Barangay Old Bulatukan, a community composed of 65 Manobo households, is beyond the reach of the electrical grid, and has relied on kerosene for lighting and fuel wood for cooking. US-based NGO Seacology has funded a micro-hydro powered generator for the community as well as a tree nursery. Philippine-based NGO Yamog provided technical expertise for the construction of the generator, harnessing the power of small streams without negatively impacting the surrounding environment.

According to Seacology's Philippines Field Representative Ferdie Marcelo, who visited the community in August 2009 for the formal dedication of the micro-hydro system, the village now receives 10 kilowatts of electricity. The community has planted 8,000 seedlings, and fruit trees to



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A SOLAR POWERED NUDIBRANCH (*Phyllodesmium briareum*) is frequently found in the waters of Mindanao – Southern Philippines.

produce highly marketable mangosteens and lanzones. Meanwhile tribesmen have been acting as rotating forest guards to patrol the watershed and to prevent poaching. In the words of Marcelo, "With this Manobo community deriving clean and renewable energy from their watershed, there is little doubt that, in the area of Mt. Apo where they hold sway, the forest and everything in it will remain pristine for the next generation."

This is just one example of a remote Philippine community organizing to protect their environment and at the same time improve living standards. Though Palau Island, in the very northeastern tip of the country, it is legally protected under a 1992 act of congress, where illegal logging, "slash and burn" farming still occurs due to limited land available for cultivation. With funding from Seacology and assistance from the local NGO APFTI, the Palau community is renovating its multi-purpose hall where the locals gather to discuss conservation, training issues, and help manage their resources. In exchange for Seacology's assistance, the community has pledged to protect 2,172 hectares of forest over the next 20 years. In a nation of 7,107 islands, small communities from the south to the north are opting to protect their resources and ensure a brighter future for their next generation. 