



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: *Lakbayon (Steps) – Women Steps Towards Sustainability*

Destination, Country: Sipalay City, Philippines

Submitted by: Jerick H. Lacson, City Tourism Officer

In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

Local women’s volunteer group in their daily beach walk and clean-up activity.



Summary:

A simple strolling exercise activity of a women's organization contributed to solve the city's waste pollution problem in the Poblacion Beach, supported their family income, and helped Sipalay become a major tourist destination.

The *Lakbayon* ('Lakbay sa Baybayon' or 'Walk along the Beach') **Women's Beach Clean-up Volunteer Project** under the **Sipalay City Council for Women** has already reached 2,935 in 2023 or a total of 14,675 family member beneficiaries in 11 barangays. It has also significantly cleared and cleaned the beach from waste and led to the declaration of 40% of the shoreline as a conservation area for sea turtles and the 11-hectare beach and mangrove forest. Through the consistent clean-up, the beach is now the main beach tourism and recreational area of the city and the venue to various local and national-level sports tourism activities.





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GOOD PRACTICE STORY



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

As the main tourist destination in the province of Negros Occidental, Sibalay City continuously strives for sustainability to be the core of its tourism development. Located in the central Philippines in the Visayas islands, Sibalay boasts a variety of tourism products such as beaches, dive sites, islets, waterfalls, caves, and various sports tourism events.

It was a former **mining community in the 1950s** and was home to Southeast Asia's largest copper mine. It was closed in 2001 due to: labor disputes, and environmental disasters that caused destruction to croplands, it polluted the river systems, and brought dust-related respiratory illnesses.

The city now turned towards tourism as its main economic driver backed by strong environmental conservation and protection policies and initiatives. Sibalay offers **beautiful coastal areas lined with unspoiled beaches** and unique accommodation establishments. **Diving is one of its top tourism activities** with marine protected areas, sea caves, and shipwrecks, among others while **caves are also abundant in the city**. Ecotourism development projects are currently being carried out including mangrove parks, waterfall-river systems, and forest-protected areas. Its beach area, specifically the **Poblacion Beach, the main tourist attraction of 2 kilometers, hosts various sports tourism events** including surfing, skimboarding, beach volleyball, mountain biking, triathlon, and its flagship sports, kite flying being recognized as the 'kite tourism capital' of the Philippines.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

A dumpsite of household and human wastes from locals living in the urban area and a stretch of sand filled with piles of plastics, entangled trunks of trees, and storm debris, Poblacion Beach right at the center of Sibalay City.

Through the *Lakbayon* Project which started as a walking and strolling activity of the *barangay* (smallest local government unit) council for women, it has transformed the area and given life to the local tourism industry that provides employment, income, and recreation to the people.

- **Environmental issues**
 - **Waste pollution** – waste pollution caused by illegal dumping mainly from the urbanized part of the city center, fecal wastes from local informal settlers, and storm debris
 - **Low and limited fish catch** – due to the waste pollution problem
 - **Low Wildlife survivability** – especially the endangered sea turtles that cannot lay their eggs, and mangrove and beach forest seedlings survivability is low
- **Social issues**
 - **Limited income of families** – living in the coastal communities of Poblacion Beach
 - **Limited Women engagement** – as most are housewives
 - **Unhealthy lifestyle** – mental and physical health of women since their daily routine is just focused on household chores
- **Economic issues**
 - **Constrained tourism and commercial activities** – due to waste pollution problems

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

Started in 2000 by the Sibalay City Council for Women in partnership with the City Government of Sibalay, the **Lakbayon Project** has implemented the following:

- Women's Beach Clean-up Volunteer Project targeted to promote a healthy community through a daily morning walk along the Poblacion Beach while regularly cleaning the

shoreline. The volunteer group is composed of single mothers, wife of fisherfolk, teenagers or students, and abled senior citizens.

- Volunteers clean, collect, and dispose of waste strictly practicing proper ecological solid waste management guidelines supervised by the City Environment and Natural Resources Office.

(Please see attachments regarding complete details of the project and timeline of implementation)

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

- Number, commitment, and involvement of volunteers increased throughout the years with support from the women's council. Also, the strong leadership of the council helped the project's continuity and sustainability.
- Policy and incentive support from the city government and expansion to other areas of the city, an indicator that the implementation is effective and replicable.
- Support from other agencies, stakeholders, and partners both private and public also helped the project. *(See attachments for a complete list of partners)*
- The increase in the number of investors and businesses in the beach area is an indicator of the project's impact on the local economic development. *(See attachments for a complete count of tourism activities)*

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

"It did not only change our place but it also changed and turned us into responsible individuals," says Ms. Jeraldine Oyo-a, the president of the Sipalay City Council for Women, during one of the discussions about the lessons learned from the project.

- Valuing the spirit of volunteerism is the biggest lesson learned from the project as it was able to continue for 23 years.
- Sustaining small actions results in bigger impacts with consistency.
- Choosing the right persons willing and able to do the task and their commitment is essential.
- Ownership of the project is vital for its sustained implementation.
- Rotation of monetary incentives.
- Instilled discipline among the members and cooperation from the public.
- Promoting community engagement instead of hiring personnel to clean the public areas helped lessen costs for the city government.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

- **Environmental impacts**
 - o **Waste pollution reduction** – Improved the appearance of the Poblacion Beach from a former dumpsite of solid waste and human wastes of the locals to a clean public beach.
 - o **Increase in fish catch and food supply** – Increase in fish catch from 20,715 kgs in 2020 to 115,840 kgs in 2022. More frequent traditional shore fishing activities using nets called 'panuwayang' are also noted which are the food source of locals in the area.
 - o **Increase in forest covers** – Increase in the forest covers from 10 hectares in 2020 to 18.3 hectares in 2022. The density of trees per hectare increased by 2,100. Also, an increase in the beach forest species diversity from 14 in 2020 to 31 in 2023, significantly **lessened the impacts of Typhoon Odette last 2021.**
 - o **Protected area declaration** – Declaration of 800-meter portion of the Poblacion Beach or 40% of the entire coastline specifically in Brgy. 5 as part of the local protected area.
- **Social impacts**

- **Increase in number of beneficiaries** – From 309 in 2000 to 2,935 in 2023. It has now covered four beaches in four barangays and totally covered 11 barangays.
- **Number of families supported** – From 1,545 in 2000 to 14,675 in 2023.
- **Incentive support to volunteers** – PHP40 per hour or USD0.72 as an incentive or P1,200 or \$21.72 for 15 days for the 2-hour daily clean-up activity. Incentives amounting to PHP1,200 can already buy half a sack of rice for two to three weeks of consumption.
- **Women engagement through social and livelihood projects** – Undergo social seminars on literacy, women’s rights, reproductive health, livelihood support training, and etc.
- **Physical and mental health** – The promotion of physical health is facilitated by the walking component, while socializing with other volunteers provides a reprieve from the burden of household chores.
- **Healthy environment** – Declaration of Barangays I, II, and V as Zero Open Defecation (ZOD) barangays in 2021.
- **Community cooperation and support** – Cooperation from local residents and tourists in maintaining the cleanliness of the beach. Increase in linkages and partnerships.
- **Economic**
 - **Commercial and tourism establishments** – Operation of a total of 49 food establishments and 16 hotels and inns with 180 total room count and 850 pax of capacity in the area.
 - **Tourist arrival** – The number of tourists has steadily increased from 34,989 in 2007 to its peak in 2019, reaching 292,909. Despite a gradual recovery from the pandemic, there were still 178,170 guests in 2022. Since 2012, the beach has served as a venue for a variety of activities, including kite flying, beach volleyball, triathlon, skimboarding, surfing, beach frisbee, and beach football.
- **Institutional**
 - **Minimal budget but big impact** – Instead of hiring full-time personnel to do the clean-up, it has given savings benefits to the city while involving and covering more beneficiaries.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

Empowerment and consistency are keys for the project’s success.

Engage those who are directly affected by the issue and problems, which turned them into a solution themselves: more efficient, effective, and sustainable.

- Consistency and commitment from the local communities involved.
- Support from government partners is crucial, especially concerning the budget and the authority to implement the project comprehensively.
- Choosing the right and committed group leaders is critical to ensuring that all targets are achieved and that all members are on board.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

- List of awards received
 - **2005 Gawad Pangulo sa Kapaligiran – Nominee**
 - Lakbayon Project as the main project for the Clean and Green Program of Sinalay City
 - **2006 Winner - Best Tourism Destination** (Emerging) Western Visayas Tourism Excellence Awards of Department of Tourism Region VI
 - **2006 National Grand Winner – “Hiyas Ng Turismo”** Nationwide Search for New and Undiscovered Tourist Destinations by Women in Travel Manila and Department of Tourism (DOT)
 - **2016 – 2017 – Silver and Gold Awards** – Seal of Good Environmental Governance from the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental
 - Sinalay City’s environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation initiatives

- o **2018 – 2019 – Platinum Awards** – Seal of Good Environmental Governance from the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental
 - Sipalay City’s environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation initiatives
- o **2017 – 2019 - Grand Winner** for three years and Hall of Fame Awardee, Tourism Kite Festival- Best Tourism Event (Sports-City Category) ATOP-DOT Pearl Awards
 - Sipalay’s kite festival held at the Poblacion Beach as the best sports tourism event
- o **2021 Awardee - Zero Open Defecation (ZOD) Declared Barangays** from the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental
 - For Barangays I, II, and V which are the implementation sites of Lakbayon Project
- o **2021 Hiyas sang Sipalay from the City Government of Sipalay**
 - Lakbayon Project - Outstanding Individuals and Groups of Sipalay City in the field of Gender and Development
- o **- 2021 – 2022 - Sustainability 1 and 2** Abanse Negrense Good Environmental Governance Award (ANGEGA) from the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental
 - Sipalay City’s environmental protection, conservation, and rehabilitation initiatives
- o **2022 Kite Tourism Capital of the Philippines** was conferred by the Kite Association of the Philippines (KAP) last March
 - For the promotion of the kite flying art, culture, and sports in Sipalay City held every year at the Poblacion Beach
- o **2022 Abanse Babaye Para sa Dunang Manggad** (Individual Category)
 - Mrs. Maritess Barcoma as President of the Barangay 4 Women’s Federation
- o **2023 Certificate of Recognition**
 - City Government and U.S. Embassy in the Philippines
- Supporting documents and files
 - o <https://bit.ly/LakbayonSipalayAttachments>
 - Lakbayon Project - Project Details and Timeline of Activities
 - Lakbayon Project Proposal – 2012
 - Lakbayon - Forms, Monitoring Sheets, Attendance
 - Lakbayon and Lakbayon Project Proposal – 2022
 - Lakbayon Project Proposal – 2016, 2000
 - Lakbayon Budget Increase Proposal
 - Ordinance 2004 – 009 SCCW Creation
 - Resolution 2013 – 019 Budget Increase
 - Sipalay Tourism and Environment Policies
 - Lakbayon – List of Partners and Fund Sources
 - Lakbayon – Complete List of Awards and other-related citations
 - Lakbayon - List of Trainings and Other Activities
 - Lakbayon - Personal Experiences of Volunteers
 - Lakbayon - Social Media Posts
 - Lakbayon – Records, files, and other documents
 - Sipalay Tourism Profile 2023 - V1