



Good Practice Story Title: Turning Environmental Risks to Green Wins

Destination: Sipalay City

Country: Philippines

Submitting Organization: City of Sipalay

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

Sipalay City, once home to Southeast Asia's largest copper mine in the 1950s, faced significant challenges due to labor disputes and environmental disasters. These issues led to the destruction of croplands, pollution of river systems, and widespread dust-related respiratory illnesses, ultimately resulting in the mine's closure in 2001.

Overcoming its polluted and climate-vulnerable past, Sipalay transformed into the province's premier tourism destination. The city embraced tourism as its main economic driver, supported by robust environmental conservation and protection initiatives. Today, Sipalay boasts beautiful coastal areas with unspoiled beaches and a variety of ecotourism sites, including mangrove parks, waterfalls, and beach forests. Additionally, Sipalay has become a hub for sports tourism, hosting events such as diving, surfing, skimboarding, triathlons, beach volleyball, mountain biking, and kite flying.

Through dedicated efforts in environmental restoration and sustainable tourism development, Sipalay City has successfully turned its vulnerabilities into opportunities, becoming a vibrant tourist destination.





Summary of Good Practice Story:

How a coastal community-led tree planting activity started 19 years ago evolved into an 18-hectare urban ecotourism greenbelt that safeguarded 35,385 residents from the wrath of Super Typhoon Rai (Odette), the strongest typhoon in Sibalay City's history.

In 2005, residents began a modest tree growing initiative on an open beachfront to shield the coastal community from monsoon winds and waves. Today, this effort has transformed into a vital mangrove and beach forest conservation area at the heart of the city.

The **Green Belt Eco Park and Critical Habitat (Green BEaCH)** initiative, formalized in 2020, has been flourishing over the years. This project has transformed into an urban greenbelt zone, providing a community eco-park for residents, a sustainable livelihood through ecotourism, and a sanctuary for endangered marine turtles and local and migratory birds.

Issues faced:

Sibalay City's Green BEaCH Project tackles the local impact of the global climate crisis. From humble origins as a fishermen's tree planting effort, it has grown into the city's primary urban forest cover and greenbelt, showcasing environmental stewardship and community resilience in just a few years.

Environmental issues

- Urban area exposed to strong winds and waves during typhoon season
- Coastal erosion and inundation
- Low forest cover and sparse plant diversity
- Illegal cutting of trees and sand quarrying
- Indiscriminate gathering of marine turtle eggs
- Low water quality affecting coral areas
- High surface and air temperatures in beach and coastal areas

Economic issues

- Limited sources of income and livelihood
- Tourism opportunity not maximized
- Diminished fish and seafood yield

Social Issues

- Conflicts over resource utilization
- No area management plan
- Practice of open defecation
- Limited stakeholder involvement





Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

Since its inception in 2005, the project has transformed from a modest endeavour led by local fishermen to the **Sipalay Green BEach Project** under the City Environment and Natural Resources Office. This community-driven, multi-sectoral initiative engages various stakeholders with the aim of establishing an urban green belt benefiting residents, tourists, and local wildlife.

- 1. Biodiversity and Resource Inventory and Assessment**
Comprehensive inventories conducted in 2020, 2021, and 2023 documented the area's biodiversity and resources. This collaboration with local universities and environmental organizations provided essential baseline data for protection efforts.
- 2. Community Preparation and Multi-Stakeholder Planning**
A management planning process in 2021 included all stakeholders—women, youth, religious groups, LGUs, NGOs, and national government agencies—leading to the creation of a six (6)-year Local Conservation Area Ecotourism and Management Plan.
- 3. Education and Information Drive Campaign**
From 2020 to 2022, community education campaigns, information drives, clean-up initiatives, and reforestation activities raised local awareness about ecosystem conservation. These efforts involved local media, schools, community organizations, LGUs, government agencies, and marine conservation experts.
- 4. Establishment of Mangrove and Beach Forest Nursery and Seedbank**
A nursery and seedbank were established in 2023 to support reforestation efforts, propagating native mangrove and beach forest species. This initiative involved local government funding, technical support from environmental NGOs, and local stewardship.
- 5. 'Adopt an Area' Reforestation Program**
Launched in 2023, this program allows organizations, individuals, or sectors to adopt and take responsibility for specific areas in the beach and mangrove forest, enhancing reforestation efforts.
- 6. Incentives for Locals and Fisherfolk Organizations**
An incentive program started in 2022 had been providing quarterly financial support to fisherfolk organizations for nursery maintenance and forest area monitoring. This ensures ongoing community engagement and stewardship.
- 7. Community-based Implementation and Monitoring**
Local community members are empowered as protectors and first responders for illegal activities and wildlife emergencies such as marine turtle nesting, hatching, rescue, and stranding cases.





Achievements and Results:

The **Sipalay Green BEaCH Project** has achieved significant milestones in environmental, economic, and social realms, enhancing the overall welfare of the community.

Environmental Results:

- **Protected Area Declaration** – 18-hectare declared protected area including 800-meter coastline as an urban green belt, critical marine turtle nesting site, and wetlands sanctuary for migratory bird
- **Protection from Disaster** – Protected 35,385 residents from extreme weather events like the 2021 Category 5 Super Typhoon Rai (Odette), Sipalay's worst typhoon disaster and the Philippines' second costliest typhoon
- **Increased Biodiversity** – From 14 beach forest species in 2020 to 61 in 2024 with 3,200 density of trees per hectare
- **Enriched Habitat** – From 10 hectares in 2020 to 18.3 hectares of forest covers in 2024 composed of mangrove forest, beach forest, wetland, and marshland
- **Illegal Activities Stopped** – No incident of illegal activities since 2020
- **Coastal Resiliency** – Community testimonies especially from fishermen on how the forest saved them from Typhoon Odette

Economic Results:

- **Sustainable Livelihoods** – Sustainable livelihood opportunities for 3,683 residents
- **Boost to Local Economy** – Target of 12,000 tourists annually, potentially infusing P200 million to the local economy with 49 food establishments and 16 hotels and inns operational around the area
- **Increase Tourist arrival** – Helped increase tourist arrival from 34,989 tourists in 2007 to its highest count in 2023 or 357,803
- **Increase in fish catch and food supply** – Increase in fish catch from 20,715 kgs in 2020 to 115,840 kgs in 2022

Social Results

- **Eco-tourism and Management Plan** – Resolved resource-use conflicts through the multi-stakeholder 6-year management plan
- **Healthy Coastal Area** – The Community was declared as Zero Open Defecation (ZOD) barangays in 2021 because of continuous clean-up
- **Community Empowerment** – nearly 155 stakeholders capacitated in various activities and ongoing reforestation efforts catered to 100 partners and 1,130 individuals
- **Fishermen as Community Enforcers** – 88 fishermen receive incentives as policy enforcers





Lessons Learned and Advice:

"In nature's embrace, our safeguard lies in stewardship," declares Mr. Fredo Redoble, pioneer of the 2005 tree planting initiative. From humble beginnings, it blossomed into Sipalay's vital urban forest. Now its guardian, Redoble epitomizes the power of vision and dedication.

- **Nature as the greatest protector** – because of the sustained and continuous efforts, the urban forest became the city's shield for strong typhoons
- **Community empowerment** – empowering the community as stewards and first responders was crucial to implement the project and monitor the area
- **Participative planning** – a participative management planning process that included all stakeholders helped harmonize and resolve these conflicts
- **Linkages and partnerships** - limited funding and human resources were initial barriers thus leveraging partnerships with NGOs, local businesses, and government agencies provided the necessary financial and technical support
- **Incentives for locals** - establishing an incentive program for local communities ensured ongoing engagement and maintenance.

Recognitions and Additional References

Awards and Citations

1. **Best LGU implementing Risk Resiliency Program Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Disaster Risk Reduction (RRP CCAM DRR) through Establishment of Nursery** by Department of Social Welfare and Development Regional office 6 last November 30, 2023
2. **Special Award - Abanse Negrense Good Environment Governance** for Compliant LGU in the Establishment of Coastal Greenbelt Zones by Provincial Government of Negros Occidental last December 5, 2023
3. **Certificate of Recognition** for the Exemplary Contribution in Environmental Conservation, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Urban Forest (Tree parks, Greenbelts, Nature Centers, or Roadside Planting of Trees) by Provincial Government of Negros Occidental last December 27, 2023

Supporting Documents and Files

- Google Drive Link
 - <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tQXliX3SYiz1J0haQGyYZ5O3Ekloi-mr-?usp=sharing – empty? No photos yet>

