

Calicoan People's Organization at the Frontline of Local Climate Action in Eastern Samar

By Ma. Czarinna de Cadiz

In the remote southern reaches of Guiuan, Eastern Samar, a hidden gem awaits. Far from the bustling cityscapes and tourist hubs, the serene island of Calicoan is a place where only a few lucky travelers find themselves.

But what they discover is not just the 'Surfers Paradise of Visayas'; it's a sanctuary for both thrill-seekers and nature enthusiasts.

Calicoan Island, home to [7,692 residents](#) [hailing from four different barangays](#) – Baras, Ngolos, Pagnamitan, and Sulangan – is an enchanting blend of adventure and biodiversity.

Nestled within the [Guiuan Marine Reserve Protected Landscape and Seascape \(GMRPLS\)](#), the island is a piece of heaven spanning over 60,488 hectares, encompassing the neighboring islands of Manicani, Candulom, Sulu-an, Tubabao, and Homonhon.

However, the very beauty that makes Calicoan a sanctuary is also what makes it vulnerable. Beyond the breaking waves and golden shores lies a fragile ecosystem, teeming with life, but under constant threat.

The island faces significant risks, both natural and man-made. Recurring typhoons and rising sea levels pose persistent threats, while rampant illegal fishing practices and mining activities in the region cast long shadows over the island's future.

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The onslaught of Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 severely affected one of the main sources of livelihood for the local communities. Fisherfolk reported a drastic [decrease in the volume of their daily fish catch](#) from an average of three kilograms (kg) to just one kg a day, despite their proximity to the Inatraban and Boronayan sanctuaries.

Bearing the brunt of these challenges, fishermen from the island decided to mobilize and form the Bantay Dagat Calicoan Fleet, a people's organization with the primary aim of protecting the island's biodiversity from illegal fishing activities and other detrimental anthropogenic practices. The group, now known as the Samahan ng Bantay Dagat ng SUNGOBA (Sulangan, Ngolos, and Baras) nga Nagkakaurusa or SBDSAN, started out as three separate organizations before forming a coalition, primarily to address the huge impact on their livelihood brought about by Haiyan and the exacerbating threats to their immediate environment and sources of livelihood at the present.

SBDSAN was initially formed to patrol the area and apprehend illegal fishers who continue to use dynamites, sodium, or cyanide to increase fish catch, as well as those who engage in destructive practices such as cutting down mangroves for fuel wood. Currently, there are 17 active members and volunteers—a significant decrease from the original 35—who operate SBDSAN's coastal guard house and patrol the area on a rotating schedule.

With the influx of tourists as the island gained recognition as a premier surfing destination, SBDSAN President Rogelio Abdul Sr. shared that the organization's workload has expanded to include the protection and conservation of the surrounding landscape. With this, SBDSAN is now actively involved in coastal cleanups and the apprehension of sand-hauling activities.

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Nanay Edith showcasing the locally-produced food items to the INSPIRE Chief-of-Party, Rebecca Paz

A short distance away in Sitio Comverse Calicoan, the Comverse Fisherfolks' Association (CFA) was founded in 1996, long before Haiyan's fury. Like SBDSAN, CFA's members are fierce protectors of the island's biodiversity. Their devotion has been passed down through generations of community advocates.

Among its pioneer members were the parents of its current president, Editha Mabini. Nanay Edith has been active in promoting local climate action for more than two decades.

CFA's Moni Grocery Cooperative in Sitio Comverse, Calicoan



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Comverse Fisherfolks' Association president Nanay Edith at the CFA community grocery

In 2011, she formed the Comverse Seaweed Farmers' Association (CSFA) to empower and mobilize the small community of seaweed farmers in her barangay. The goal was to enhance their access to institutional resources to further their shared advocacies. She served as CSFA's leader before assuming the role as president in the well-acclaimed CFA following the passing of her father. Under her leadership, the CFA successfully established a community-based production of various seaweed-based commodities for commercial sale, as well as a cooperative, managed by the organization's members, that caters to the basic needs of the community in Sitio Comverse. During the recent 35th anniversary celebration of Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities (ICSC)'s partner in the implementation of the Multi-actor

Partnerships Towards Enhanced Local Climate Action (MAP-ELCA), the Guiuan Development Foundation Inc. (GDFI) honored Nanay Edith with a Champion of the Sea Award, recognizing her active involvement in advocating for a locally-led climate action and biodiversity conservation.

Though the challenges to Calicoan's biodiversity persist, the resilient communities continue to band together to defend their cherished land and sea. These grassroots organizations, while limited in their capacities and access to resources, have made substantial strides in local climate action. What's truly remarkable is their intergenerational commitment to preserving their home from further destruction and exploitation.

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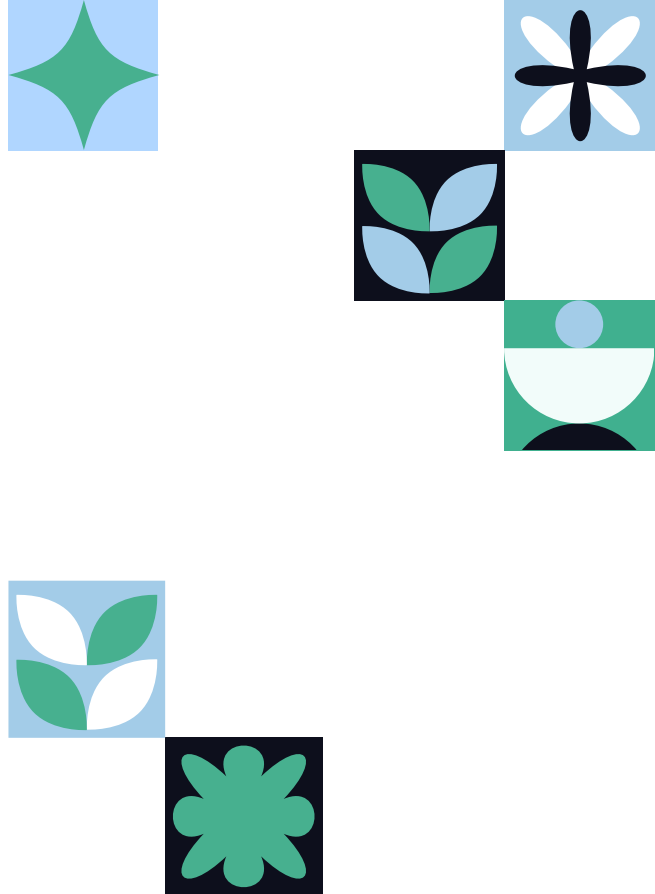
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Through initiatives like MAP-ELCA and collaborations among various stakeholders, there's hope that these guardian organizations will gain more resources and support.

Calicoan Island's beauty, from its pristine waves to its delicate ecosystems, remains in safe hands, watched over by those who know its value best – its resilient protectors.

ICSC's MAP ELCA Project Team meets with SBDSAN members in Barangay Ngoelos, Guiuan (c) Ma. Czarinna de Cadiz/ICSC

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