

PROJECT ACE
ENDTERM REPORT

ESSENCE

AUGUST 2023



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Endterm Report
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Actions for Communities and Environment





About the Title

Community is the **essence**- the core of our conservation work.

When people in communities are reminded of the power they already hold in their hands, they meaningfully craft the future and take the lead on what is truly important.

We are honored to continue learning from them.

We center our actions on what they teach us- their deep understanding and experience of environmental, economic, and socio-political realities. We are anchored by our hope in the future where there is enough for everyone, and where exploitative greed doesn't dominate the planet. Our intrinsic nature is to keep working for a world where every island becomes a paradise once more, for all who take care of it.

To work with communities is to be reminded that we are all part of one. To be in community with each other is to realize our essence, and the meaningful work still left to be done.

Messages



Gerardo L. Ledesma

President, Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation Inc.

PRRCFI has been incredibly successful over the past decade, making a meaningful impact in various areas such as assisting cities and municipalities in establishing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and educating communities about ocean plastics waste through the SWEEP program. One notable achievement was the Wala Usik initiative, which greatly benefited Bacolod City, other LGUs on Negros Island, and even neighboring countries in the ASEAN region.

However, we have faced challenges in fulfilling our core mission of managing the Danjungan Marine Reserve and Sanctuaries (DMRS) and supporting the nearby coastal communities whose livelihoods depend on the ocean. This is where we are grateful for the timely support and assistance from LMAX Group through ACE (Action for Communities

and Environment). This partnership could be instrumental in the sustainable development of communities on the mainland, who may eventually become stewards of the DMRS and other MPAs.

With ACE, PRRCFI can now tackle various pressing environmental issues, including climate change. We aim to establish a sea level rise monitoring station, introduce a renewable energy-powered banca boat as a model for small fisherfolk, implement rainwater harvesting systems, and address deforestation. These initiatives will greatly benefit the partner communities in Southern Negros Occidental. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to LMAX Group for their generosity in making ACE year 1 and ACE 2 possible. Thank you, David, Andy, Aidan, and the entire team for your kind support and contributions to our cause.





Project ACE Team

This year with Project ACE has been transformative- it has led us into deeper waters of understanding, of empathy, of communing with people who are on the frontlines of environmental protection.

The past year has been a whirlwind of activities and programs designed to support communities and co-create solutions with them for conservation- it is fulfilling to meet our Sustainability Scholars who are now thriving in their 2nd year of college taking up Agribusiness, Forestry, Fisheries, and Agricultural & Biosystems Engineering. They have also grown through their experiences in Danjungan Island along with the youth from Brgy. Bulata and emerging young leaders from Negros who have been part the Marine and Wildlife Camps. We are also learning along with our communities on sustainable ecotourism and solid waste management, and we have provided training to them on aquatic lifesaving and

fish monitoring. The employees from LMAX Group have also been engaged through our Virtual Island Experiences, and a few of them have also visited the island to join us in our activities, like the Giant Clam Survey. The team has also partnered with other organizations for reef monitoring activities.

We have grown together as individuals, as a team, and as a community through this project. It has impacted our lives in ways that will extend beyond the present.

We are so proud of what we have accomplished in the past year. We are grateful for the support of everyone who has helped us along the way. May we always be guided by the essence of the work that we do- the environment and the communities that shape each other for the years to come.



Messages



Rhoda Avanzado Phillips

Founder and Chair, Communities for Nature

As Project ACE's inaugural year draws to a close, the time has come to reflect on the hard work of everyone involved. From our community partners at the PRRCFI to our corporate supporters at LMAX Group; staff and officers on Danjungan Island to our brilliant Sustainability Scholars and dedicated Communities for Nature trustees; and to all the community members who have so fully engaged with the program's activities - the Project could not have been the success it has been without your efforts.

I am incredibly proud of how Project ACE has laid down such a solid foundation for relationships between the PRRCFI, LMAX Group and local communities to continue to grow and flourish. Critically, the Project's initiatives are not solely aimed at conservation and preservation work, but also in building strong ties with local communities through education and practical learning, training a host of future conservationists and ensuring that any impacts of the program are felt long-term in an effort to create a sustainable future for all.

The Project's range of community-focused initiatives - which includes training local operators on the importance of sustainable tourism and inspiring the next generation through marine and wildlife camps - really demonstrate the Project's commitment to long-term success. To run these while also sustaining the PRRCFI's ongoing work in marine conservation, through activities like assisting

with the giant clam survey and MPA FishMApp, is testament to all the hard work put in by all involved with Project ACE. The amount that has been achieved over the year is astonishing, and it is wonderful to witness the impact the program has had not only on Danjungan island, but also on the people - local to international - whose lives it has touched.

I was fortunate enough to return to Danjungan last month, where we kicked off celebrations to mark the end of Project ACE's inaugural year with the annual Fluvial Parade; witnessing a host of local communities come together on a boat tour around the island, taking in the beautiful sights and sounds. It was heartwarming to be able to connect with people from all walks of life, all sharing stories of how appreciative they are of all the work Project ACE has done so far.

It is truly an honour to have had the opportunity to facilitate the relationship between LMAX Group and the PRRCFI which made this all possible; and to support a partnership that cares so deeply about placing local communities at the heart of conservation and sustainability efforts. Next year will be bigger and better, and a host of exciting activities are already in the works for the coming months. Thank you for coming along with us on this journey - we are so grateful for your support, and we look forward to seeing you again next year.



David Mercer

Chief Executive Officer of LMAX Group

We are proud to have successfully completed the first year of our partnership with PRRCFI. We are thankful to have great partners in PRRCFI and recognise the incredible efforts of all those involved at the charity and within the ACE program.

We have been acutely aware of the brilliant work by PRRCFI over the last three decades, prioritising conservation and sustainable development and bringing it to meaningful stakeholders within the ecosystem; schools, local governments, and community leaders. This agenda-setting and education-focused awareness building has helped local communities to make informed decisions, engaging them to appreciate, save and preserve biodiversity to work toward a more sustainable future.

At LMAX Group, we strongly believe in playing an active role in the development of young people worldwide and driving meaningful, positive change. Not just across global capital markets, but throughout the communities around us.

Awareness starts at home – and environmental and sustainable action begins with structural and behavioral change within our immediate surroundings. It is about making informed decisions and collaborating with like-minded organisations to help us take material steps toward making a difference.

That is why we have forged a long-term partnership with PRRCFI to create the ACE programme – an example of a collaborative partnership focused on effecting real change and making an impact on communities. We are proud to have played a small part in the lives of our sustainability scholars at ACE, by sponsoring their education and inspiring future generations to take part.

We're excited to see what the future holds as part of our two-year partnership with PRRCFI, working together to find creative solutions to social and environmental issues affecting the community.

Content

01 What is Project ACE?

Know more about the project

03 Impact

Project ACE's impact in numbers

05 Timeline

Take a look back at the Project ACE's timeline

09 Bagis II: The Voyage of the Sea Patrol Boat

Get to know about the community debut of the ACE boat

15 Sustainability Scholars: One Year Closer to Living their Dreams

Find out what keeps our scholars going

19 Marine and Wildlife Camps

Find out how these camps empower communities

29 Ecological Solid Waste Management for Ecotourism Operations

Discover the island and its mission for environmental conservation and sustainable community development

30 Kawayan: Building Better with Bamboo

Discover the wonders of bamboo and the South Negros Sea Turtle Conservation Research Center



31 Bulata Youth Day

Look at how the youth of Bulata in Cauayan celebrated the International Day of Climate Action

32 Are there still “lots of fish in the sea”?

Know more about how a fish monitoring app will aid us in our work

33 Gentle Giants of Danjungan: The Story of the Island’s Giant Clams

See the 6 species of giant clams in Danjungan, out of the 12 species in the world

38 Into the Deep: Monitoring the Reefs of Danjungan

Dive with us into the reefs of the island

40 Connected by the Ocean: Beyond Virtual Island Adventures

Go on an adventure beyond the screen

41 Certified Lifesavers

Meet the community’s Aquatic Lifesavers certified through the project

43 Conservation Through Tourism

Find out how and why we are empowering communities with sustainable tourism trainings

45 The End, The Beginning: Storytelling with ACE Bulata Youth Campers

Find out what’s next for Project ACE





EMC III



ACE

Actions for Communities and Environment

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN

LMAX GROUP

AND

PRRCFI

Beach cleanup

People and planet in deep connection and harmony; with communities leading the way towards a sustainable future for all.

This is our dream.

Here at Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation Inc., we have been partnering with LMAX Group to co-create Project ACE: Actions for Communities and Environment, from June 2022 to June 2023. This is facilitated by Communities for Nature, a UK based charity, who is acting as a conduit between PRRCFI and LMAX Group.

Through Project ACE, we are helping protect and sustain an island in the Philippines— Danjungan Island— for conservation and its biodiversity, raise and train a new generation of conservationists and citizen scientists, and open opportunities for communities to have a sustainable future through education, livelihood and development. Through the activities, we have also been internally growing in skills through island staff trainings and engaging LMAX Group staff through virtual island experiences.

We partner with the community across the marine protected area of Danjungan Island in Brgy. Bulata, Cauayan, Negros Occidental.

Contained in these pages are their stories intertwined with ours. From boat operators to young scholars to emerging climate leaders in Negros— these people are at the forefront of sustainability and climate action.

They are leading the way to our future.

They are our dreams coming true.



About our Community

The reason why Project ACE exists is for conservation and community. This community is located across the marine protected area of Danjungan Island, called Barangay Bulata- located in the municipality of Cauayan, Negros Occidental. Bulata is a coastal community with a population of nearly 6,000 people, relying on fishing and tourism for their livelihoods.

PRRCFI, along with LMAX Group and Communities for Nature are in partnership with members from Bulata to co-create solutions through education, livelihood and development from the community and for the community. Our goal is for the communities to empower themselves to participate in and benefit from community-based ecotourism- that through their livelihoods, they are thriving along with the environment. We want our communities inspired and enabled to take action for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the context of the climate crisis.

For Project ACE, we have 5 sustainability scholars from Bulata and nearby communities studying conservation-related degrees so they can support their communities in the near future. A series of training sessions and certifications for community stakeholders are also being conducted through Project ACE- engaging the communities in sustainable livelihoods and ecotourism for the planet and the people.#

Impacts

548,680

People reached online



1000+

Community members during Fluvial Parade



584

People directly engaged with activities

♂ Male: 311 ♀ Female: 263
🏳️‍🌈 Non-binary/Trans: 10



1

Sea Patrol Boat



10

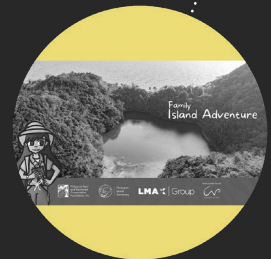
People involved in reef monitoring activities

♂ Male: 7 ♀ Female: 2
🏳️‍🌈 Non-binary/Trans: 1



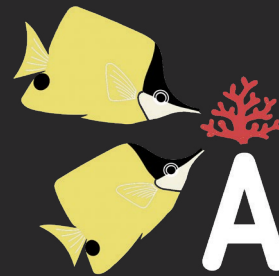
41

Local Government Unit officials involved



60+

LMAX Group employees and family engaged in Virtual Island Adventures



Actions for Community

LMAX GROUP



10

Trained lifesavers

♂ Male: 9 ♀ Female: 1



28

Balsa and Report operators involved in ecotourism

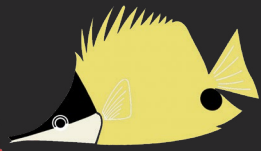
♂ Male: 22 ♀ Female: 6



5

Sustainability Scholars

♂ Male: 2 ♀ Female: 3



ACE

ities and Environment



39

Bulata youth involved

♂ Male: 19 ♀ Female: 18
🏳️‍🌈 Non-binary/Trans: 2



32

Bamboo workshop participants

♂ Male: 22 ♀ Female: 10



114

Emerging young leaders enabled in our Marine and Wildlife Camps

♂ Male: 50 ♀ Female: 59
🏳️‍🌈 Non-binary/Trans: 5



36

Solid Waste Management discussion participants

♂ Male: 25 ♀ Female: 12

Timeline

3 Marine and Wildlife Camps were held for different communities



10 community rescuers were trained and certified aquatic lifesaving



JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

20

Start of ACE Project

5 students in state universities from the rural communities of Southern Negros were given an opportunity to be scholars





5 staff from Danjungan Island and PRRCFI participated in a trainor's training on maximizing the use of MPAFishMApp



2-day training on Sustainable Tour Guiding and Operations was held

ER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

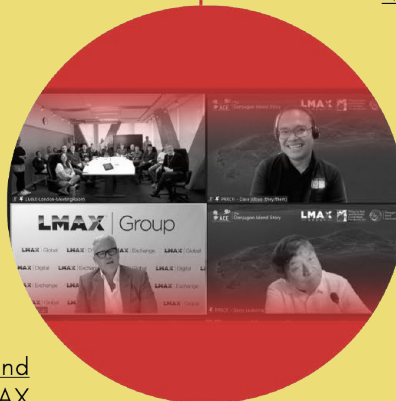
DECEMBER

2023

22



Bulata Youth Day of Climate Action



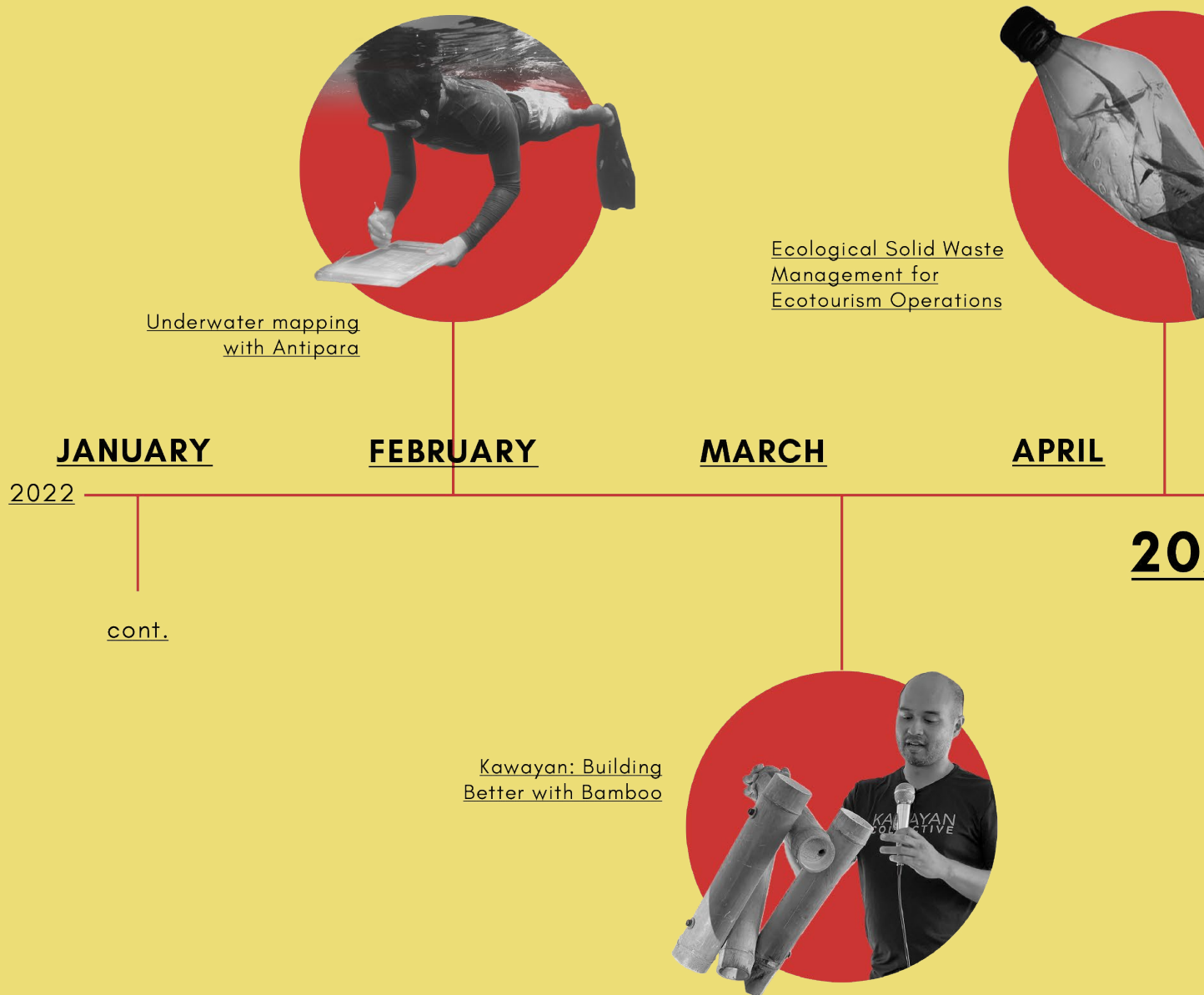
Virtual Island Experiences for LMAX

Midterm Report

ESSENCE

**Project ACE
Endterm Report
AUGUST 2023**

Timeline (cont'd)



Culmination and Renewal
with Sustainability Scholars



ACE Bulata Youth
Storytelling



Virtual Island
Experiences for LMAX

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

23

Endterm Report

Giant Clam Survey



Sea Patrol Boat joining
the Fluvial Parade



Community Partners
Culminating Activity

Bagis II: The Voyage of the Sea Patrol Boat

“And when it’s time to find home, we know the way...”

It was a collective momentous experience- and spiritual in many ways. As the boats went around the glorious seascape of Danjungan during the Fluvial Parade to celebrate the San Juan Festival, our new sea patrol boat led the way.

The sea patrol boat, called Bagis II (the local translation of “shark”) is the symbol of partnership between Danjungan-PRRCFI and LMAX Group under Project ACE. Bagis II was launched to help patrol and protect the Danjungan Marine Reserve and Sanctuaries, and will help to protect the island from illegal fishing, poaching, and pollution. It will also be used for ecotourism and for conducting environmental education programs.





It was the first Fluvial Parade since the pandemic, and it was a way for the community to express gratitude and manifest abundance during the San Juan Festival. Almost a thousand people witnessed and took part in the celebratory and reflective event, cheering all the boats on as they took to heart their well wishes and dreams.



The construction and launch of Bagis II was a major undertaking, and is a symbol of hope for the future of Danjungan Island and the communities surrounding it. This sea patrol boat is a powerful tool for conservation, and it will help to ensure that Danjungan Island remains a thriving ecosystem for generations of communities to come.#











Sustainability Scholars: One Year Closer to Living their Dreams

A lifelong journey of education and change— this is our vision for the sustainability scholars of Project ACE. It's hard to believe it's only been a year, when our collective feeling of fulfillment has seeped through the timeline of infinite possibilities—enabling us to imagine the future led by the youth from our communities.

For John Christian Matia-ong, his goal in life is to work in a field related to fisheries.



"I am the son of fisherfolk, and through finishing my studies, I can fulfill my goal to help my community." His favorite thing to do during the experiential mentoring sessions in Danjugan Island is when he gets to help in the Turtle Center construction activities, inspired by the keystone species that the foundation is endeavoring to protect.

For Angelica Nicole Entrealgo and Kristian Myle Gascon, their course in Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering will help them fulfill their dream of helping local farmers. "We've learned so many lessons, and we want to be able to innovate machinery related to agriculture." They've also shared about their desire to engage in more research-related activities during the mentoring sessions, to help them with their thesis papers in the future.



For Ryan Ellanic, his inspiration for taking up a course in Forestry is to encourage his community to grow trees so they can be protected from the floods- a natural climate solution. "During our sessions in Danjungan Island, I am learning more about the different species of trees especially in our locality."

For Rica Mae Cabanero, taking up Agribusiness excites her because of the diversity of her course. "I can pursue sustainable businesses, focusing on our food systems. I can also work in financing institutions that support our farmers."

These young scholars are the future of sustainability for their communities- and it is exciting to be there to see their dreams come true.#



Marine and Wildlife Camps

More than a hundred youth from grassroots communities have undergone a 3-day marine and wildlife camp focused on ridge-to-reef sustainable development and good governance. Three (3) camps were held for the following target groups:

- Upland ecosystem communities (ages 18-25) – terrestrial environmental issues from La Carlota, Negros Occidental
- Coastal ecosystem communities (ages 12-17) – marine environmental issues at Bulata
- Emerging community youth leaders (18-25) – good governance and sustainability issues, for alumni of PRRCFI/Danjungan programs who have opportunities or positions of potential influence in the fields of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, environmental management, education, community development, and related disciplines.



Marine Wildlife Campers from Bulata, Cuayan crossing over the bamboo bridge.

Terrestrial Environment & Society - Marine and Wildlife Camp with youth volunteers from La Carlota, Negros Occidental

A month after the Philippine national elections, the connection between environmental conservation and the need for good governance has become clearer than ever. With an upsurge of youth volunteers joining and leading campaigns in various areas unlike anything the country has ever seen before, it was a fruitful time to emphasize to these young leaders the interconnectedness of their love for Nature and the Nation.

On June 27-29, 2022, 25 active volunteers from the Ridge Ecosystems Youth in La Carlota participated in the Marine and Wildlife Camp designed especially for them- passionate youth whose enthusiasm and skills are powerful enough to influence (and even start and grow) social and environmental movements.

They were introduced to Danjungan Island- the best classroom for them to learn principles of ecology, marine & coastal ecosystems, and basic biology of corals, reef fishes, and birds.

Activities were designed for them to incorporate community-led solutions to environmental issues. In the Fantasy Island activity, they worked together in groups to co-design a sustainable and climate-resilient community. This was connected to their activity on Community Value-Mapping in which they discussed strategies on how to better understand the resources and needs of their communities.

Through this marine and wildlife camp, the interconnectedness of community, resource management, and conservation were highlighted. The camp concluded with their heartfelt pledges for Mother Earth and their motherland, which they committed to serving and protecting with all they have.



(From top to bottom) La Carlota youth volunteers during bird watching activity; Participant poses for a picture while snorkeling; Group photo of La Carlota youth volunteers with the camp facilitators.



Bulata youth campers raising their hands during an activity.



Bulata youth observing birds during bird watching activity at the Turtle Beach.



Coastal Environment & Livelihood: Marine and Wildlife Camp with youth from Bulata

On August 9-11, 34 young people from the grassroots communities of Brgy. Bulata were engaged in the Marine and Wildlife Camp. Brgy. Bulata is the community across the marine protected area of Danjugan Island.

Most of the campers have grown up only seeing Danjugan Island from afar, and have experienced the richness and beauty of the marine reserve for the first time. With wide eyes and awed hearts, they explored the 7 ecosystems in Danjugan Island, learned the vital biodiversity roles of each ecosystem and its functions in climate stability. The campers also experienced the co-designing of a sustainable and climate resilient community through the Fantasy Island activity.

To deepen their conservation core values and passion in advocating for the environment, they also participated in a “*pulong-pulong*”— a multi-stakeholder roleplay with their groups representing different government agencies and non-government collectives to be either for or against an environment and livelihood issue. Wearing different hats assigned to them, they discussed the issue of banning the landing of commercial fishing vessels in their area while taking into consideration the small businesses that will be relocated to clear the beach.

Taking on various roles helped them understand the complexity and interconnectedness of community livelihood and environmental issues— that these have so many layers and pressure points that they can analyze, so that they can strategize their advocacy campaigns as community members and conservationists.

(From bottom left to right) Dave Albao sits with the Bulata participants in a “pulong-pulong”; Campers gathers in a circle during an activity; Bulata youth enjoys watching an educational video.



Emerging Young Leaders in Governance: Marine and Wildlife Camp for Alumni of Danjungan Island and PRRCFI Programs

The biggest camp by Project ACE, and one of the most meaningful events in the past decade- this is the coming together of people who have been part of PRRCFI and Danjungan Island's projects and programs within the last ten years.

10 years of stories worth telling- of struggles fought and won, of victories celebrated in the bustling streets and in the silence of homes. 10 years of dreams made and fulfilled, of persistently carrying hope amidst the bleakest times.

This is a snapshot of people in the camp, young leaders in diverse fields:

Climate activists who fought and won against coal-fired power plants in Negros. Advocates pushing to keep the province the renewable energy hub of the Philippines. Environmental justice youth leaders representing the country's NGOs at the UN Climate Conference. Past scholars of Danjungan and PRRCFI who are already working in conservation and government agencies. Participants from camps in the last decade.

Student leaders. Biologists and conservationists. Human rights advocates. Writers. Artists. Community organizers.

All of them connected by one thread- their love and passion for communities and the environment.

This camp focuses on good governance and sustainability issues, for alumni of PRRCFI/Danjungan programs who have opportunities or positions of potential influence in the fields of agriculture, fisheries, forestry, environmental management, education, community development, and related disciplines.

There was an emphasis on the Powers of Community- a daily reminder of the individual and collective power that they hold to make choices that are right



Side photo (From top to bottom): Participants enjoying their free time; Group gathers for a snorkel safety instruction; A group of leaders pitch their proposed project.

Young leaders sit peacefully at the Turtle Beach for sunset appreciation.



for them and for the common good. This principle was interspersed with all the activities in the camp: from participating (or choosing to rest) during marine and terrestrial activities, to be part of the multi-stakeholder roleplay discussions, and to pitch for projects that would benefit their community.

In the pulong-pulong or the stakeholder roleplay, they were divided into groups and were assigned a particular government agency, a company with business interests, an NGO, academe, people's organizations, faith-based groups, and local community representatives. The environmental issue they discussed was the road construction in Northern Negros Natural Park- the last frontier of the province. Through this exercise, they were able to put themselves in different shoes, to question their own beliefs and way of thinking, and to strategize better in the future when planning campaigns.

They were also given a day to pitch projects that would address the needs of their communities in relation to conservation, livelihood, and the climate.

Some projects that were pitched were: children's books on the climate crisis and involving teachers/school children via school camps; a rural youth summit for the capacity and organizational development of community-based young farmers and fisherfolk to aid them in project management and policy lobbying; climate smart agriculture for young farmers; and a plastic waste reduction initiative.

We want to help them pursue their dream projects for their community so that in the next few years, their innovative ideas to address climate change and contribute to sustainability will come to life.#







Ecological Solid Waste Management for Ecotourism Operations

The morning after the Bulaklakan Festival of Brgy. Bulata, 37 balsa operators and ecotourism service providers from the community were invited for a discussion to align with ecological solid waste management practices as mandated by RA 9003, with the support and collaboration of the Municipality of Cauayan. The focus is on the latest trends, practices, and innovations in ecological solid waste management specifically tailored for ecotourism operations.

There was a discussion and open forum on the basics of solid waste management by Dev Albao, the Executive Director of PRRCFI. There was also a discussion on Sewage Pollution Prevention Memorandum Secular by the officer-in-charge of Marine Environment Protection Group of Southern Negros Philippine Coast Guard, with the open forum led by the Coast Guard Station South Negros Station Commander.

Dr. Andy Phillips, Chief Technology Officer of LMAX Group, also attended the discussion with the community.

During the discussion, the community members identified the issues: mismanaged community trash, no segregation at source, and their dumpsite is not authorized by DENR.

Their suggestions to the local government include: a consistent weekly collection schedule, an efficient system for collection (from the barangay to the municipality), more Solid Waste Management workshops, collecting tariffs especially from tourists, and a sufficient number of junkshops. They also want to establish an association for monitoring of solid waste, communal sewage, and porta-pots for ecotourism operations.#



Kawayan: Building Better with Bamboo

One of the activities that Project ACE was able to support was a bamboo workshop by Kawayan Collective in partnership with PRRCFI and Estudio Damgo, in connection with the construction of the South Negros Sea Turtle Conservation Research Center.

Years of dreaming and hard work from so many members of several communities and sectors led to this Turtle Center to soon come to life. It will be constructed using bamboo, which is a very strong material—it is often considered to be stronger than concrete, and it is more lightweight which makes it easier to transport. This Turtle Center will also be a model for sustainable architecture through the use of bamboo: nature’s gift to us that grows fast and is renewable! Bamboo is a renewable resource, and it absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere which helps to mitigate climate change.

There were 32 participants from the Danjugan Island Construction Team, Balsa and Resort Operators, Sipalay Bamboo Weaver Association, and ACE Danjugan Sustainability Scholars.#



Bulata Youth Day of Climate Action



The youth are often said to be leaders of tomorrow- but what if true empowerment lies in acknowledging that they are already leaders of today? Their idealism, enthusiasm, and willingness to take action for a better world can lead the way.

Around 45 youth campers from Brgy. Bulata spent the afternoon of October 22 cleaning up the coastlines of their local puroks, auditing the wastes they got and brainstorming on solutions. After listening to discussions on Climate Crisis 101, climate action, and youth participation in good governance— they ended the day by filming videos encouraging their fellow youth to know more about the climate and what they can do about it.

This activity is to celebrate the International Day of Climate Action with the youth of Bulata who have been part of ACE and other previous projects. Most of them have been part of the ACE Bulata Youth Marine and Wildlife Camp, and this was a continuation of their commitment to the conservation of the environment by knowing more about the climate and leading the future generation of their communities.

During the discussion on the climate, the roots of the crisis was emphasized along with the necessity of hope- that the future of our planet depends on the individual and collective actions we must take today.

They were also told the stories of their fellow youth joining and leading climate movements and campaigns, to show them that they too can spark change wherever they are.#



Are there still “lots of fish in the sea”?

A Trainor’s Training on Fish Monitoring App

“It’s important because it’s simplified- think of regular citizens participating in gathering fish data. This means more work gets done. More of the reef gets monitored. More indicators of climate change can be noted and taken action upon as early as possible,”

**Franz Alejano, Science Officer
of Philippine Reef and Rainforest
Conservation Foundation Inc.**

On December 7-9 2022 in Sipalay City, 5 staff from Danjugan Island and PRRCFI participated in a trainor’s training on maximizing the use of MPA-FishMApp- a website application for fish monitoring in Marine Protected Areas (MPA) like Danjugan.

The MPA-FishMApp is an online citizen science tool for capturing, storing, and visualizing MPA fish visual census (FVC) data. This means it is easy to use, and accessible to non-scientists as well who are willing to be trained and participate in data gathering. The app then helps in data input, visualization, storage, and analysis that are particularly useful for reef monitoring in the Island amidst the threat of the climate crisis.

This is of utmost importance to an island like Danjugan, because it is the biggest MPA in Southern Negros Occidental, and is in the center of the Coral Triangle which is where the richest biodiversity of flora and fauna can be found.#



During the training, the staff were oriented on basic sampling design for MPA Monitoring; learned basic fish ID and general fish visual census (FVC) techniques; and enhanced their knowledge on data management and interpretation skills using MPA- FishMapp

This project under the USAID Fish Right Program and is a collaborative work between the University of San Agustin’s CFI, Mr. Rodel Balingit , and Dr. Rene Abesamis of Silliman University who is also a Trustee of PRRCFI.

Gentle Giants of Danjugan: The Story of the Island's Giant Clams

The Philippines is fortunate to be at the very heart of the coral triangle — the unparalleled global center for marine biodiversity. Among the many jewels adorning this aquatic treasure trove, one stands out, both in sheer magnificence and ecological significance—the giant clams of the Philippines.

There are 12 known species of giant clams around the world. Eight of these can be found in the Philippines which are locally known as “Taklobo” or “Manlot”. And there seems to be 6 species that can be observed in the reefs around Danjugan Island.

Encountering these majestic giants is an experience unlike any other, as their immense size and vibrant hues create a breathtaking spectacle beneath the waves. Giant clams are often considered the guardians of the deep, play an indispensable role in maintaining the fragile balance of the marine ecosystem.

Source: A Field Guide to Giant Clams of the Indo-Pacific. (Mei Lin Neo, 2023)

The Giant Clams of Danjugan Island



True Giant Clam

Tridacna gigas

This is the largest living bivalve species that can grow up to 1.3 meters in length and can weigh up to 500 kg.



Boring Giant Clam

Tridacna crocea

This species of giant clam is a rock borer, completely submerging itself in corals and other hard substrates.



Horse's Hoof Clam

Hippopus hippopus

They can usually be found in the shallow patches of the reef, sandy areas, and seagrass beds around Danjungan. Interestingly, its name speaks for itself. When open, it looks like a hoof of a horse. It can also be easily recognized because of its streaked and gray-mottled mantle patterns.



Fluted Giant Clam

Tridacna squamosa

Characterized by their large, semi-circular, and well-spaced out scales, this giant clam usually inhabits a very wide depth range from reef flats to reef slopes down to 42 meters.



Noah's Giant Clam

Tridacna noae

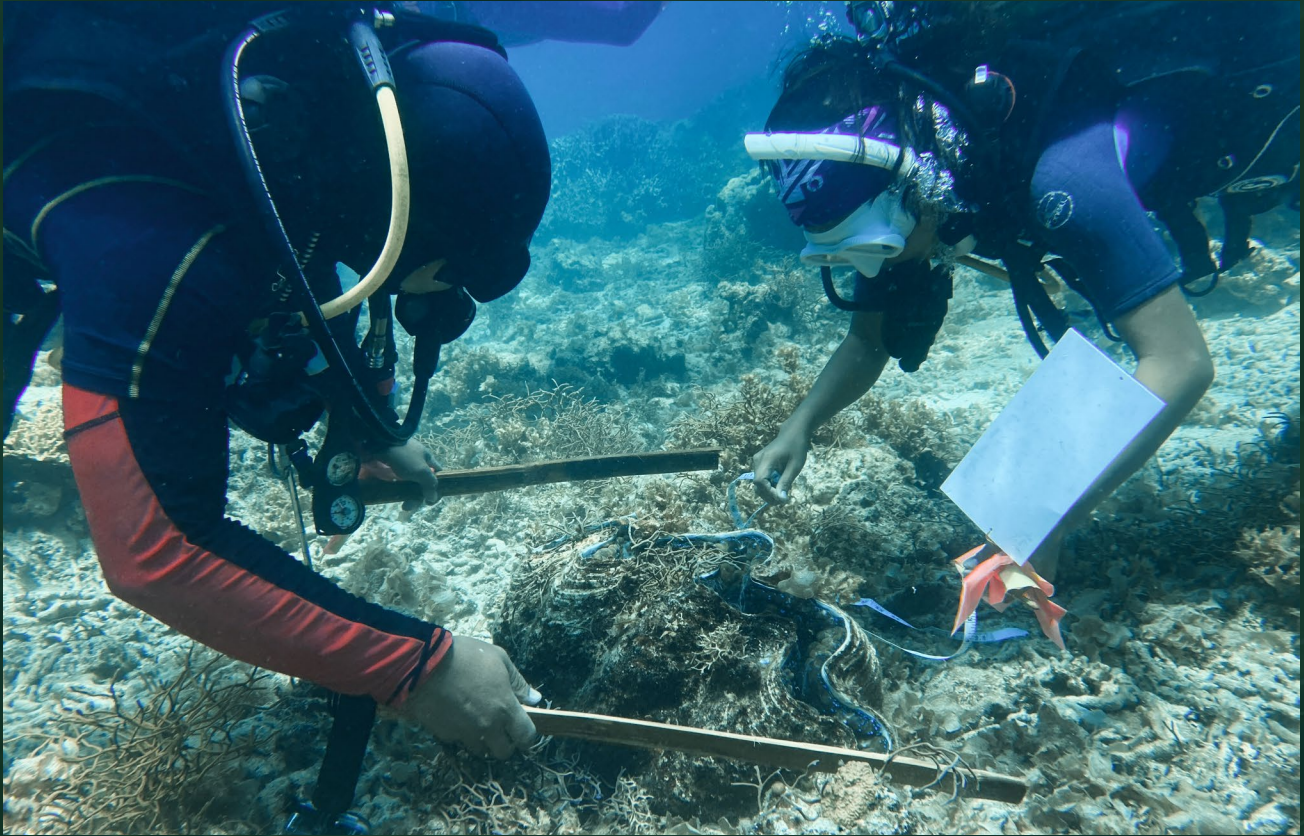
This recently reidentified species is commonly found in shallow reefs and lagoons. They can be easily recognized by their highly distinct ornamentation on their mantles with discrete teardrop patches.



Small Giant Clam

Tridacna maxima

This giant clam can be found almost anywhere in the world. The scales of their shells are close-set together with mantles usually colored blue, green, or brown.



Danjugan Island's Quest to Uncover the Population of Reseeded *Tridacna gigas* after 21 Years

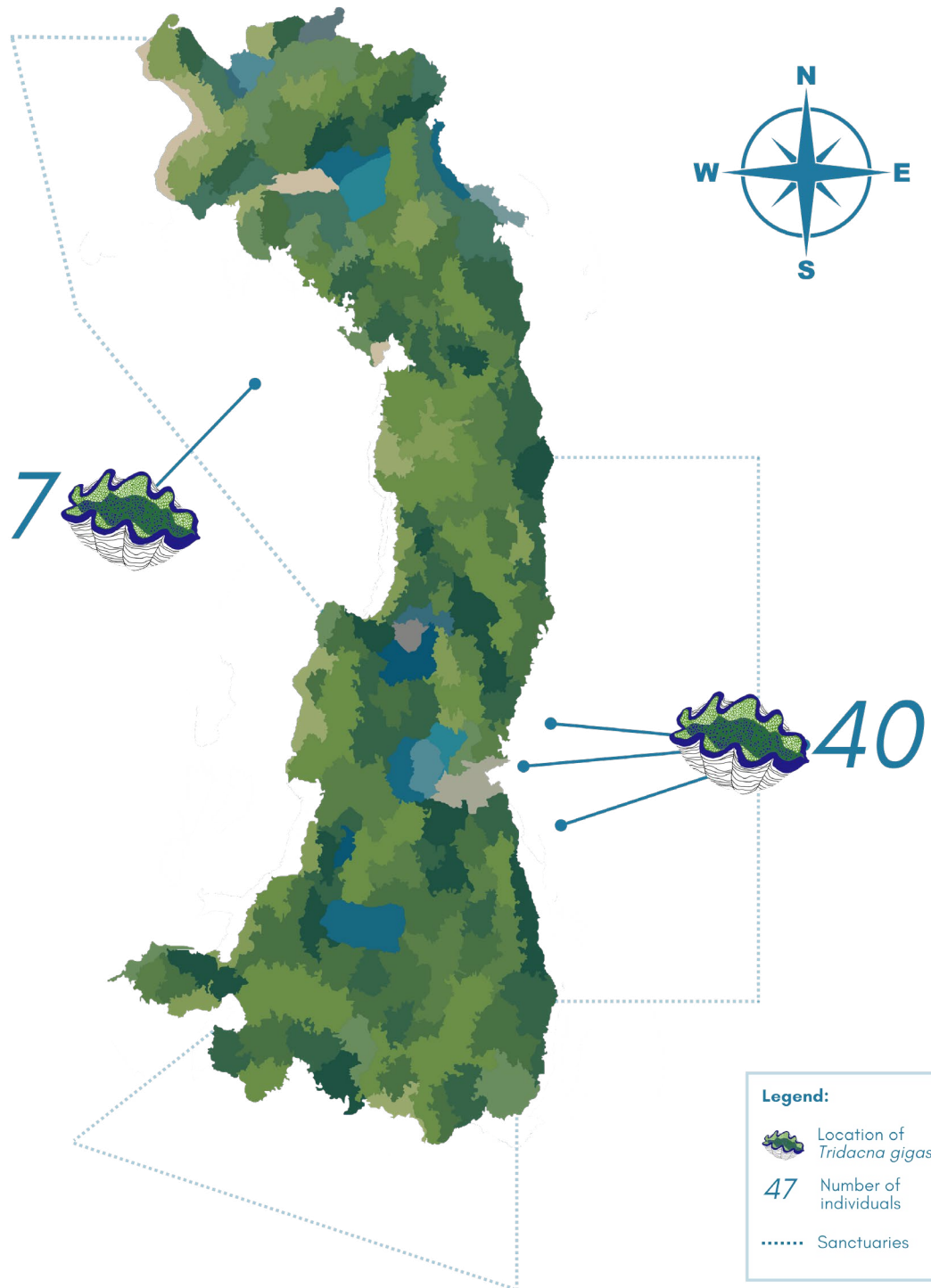
A systematic count was carried out to determine the remaining population of *Tridacna gigas* that was reseeded around Danjugan's reef through a Pew Project led by the team of late National Scientist Edgardo Gomez in 2002-2004. Five hundred juveniles were allotted for Danjugan for the purpose of rearing them.

Prior to the actual count, a reconnaissance survey was done to locate and verify areas with clam concentration in restocking sites inside the three sanctuaries in DMRS (Danjugan Marine Reserve and Sanctuaries).

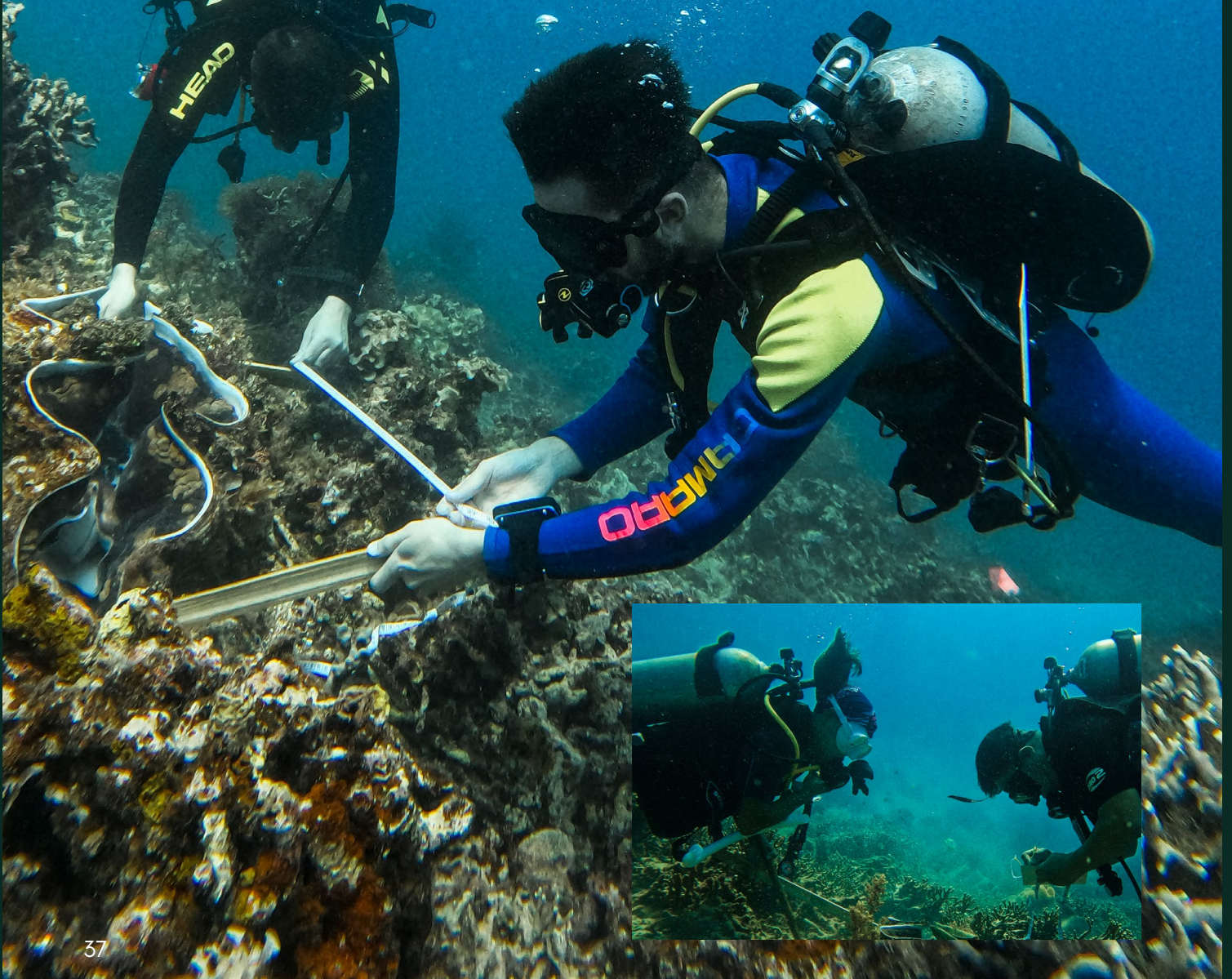
It is surprising to observe that, after 21 years, 47 adult *T. gigas* are still thriving! Unfortunately, some of the individuals exhibit signs of bleaching which can be attributed to climate change. Moving forward, we need a long-term monitoring program for these species, which can include: Adopt-a-Clam Program, community buy-in, permanent tagging options, and policy lobbying for protection.#

Tridacna gigas

of Danjungan Island



The count was participated by the local monitoring team of Danjugan Island, the diving team of Cauayan LGU, and LMAX Group's CIO Tim Turner and Victor Cabrera on May 13-15, 2023.#



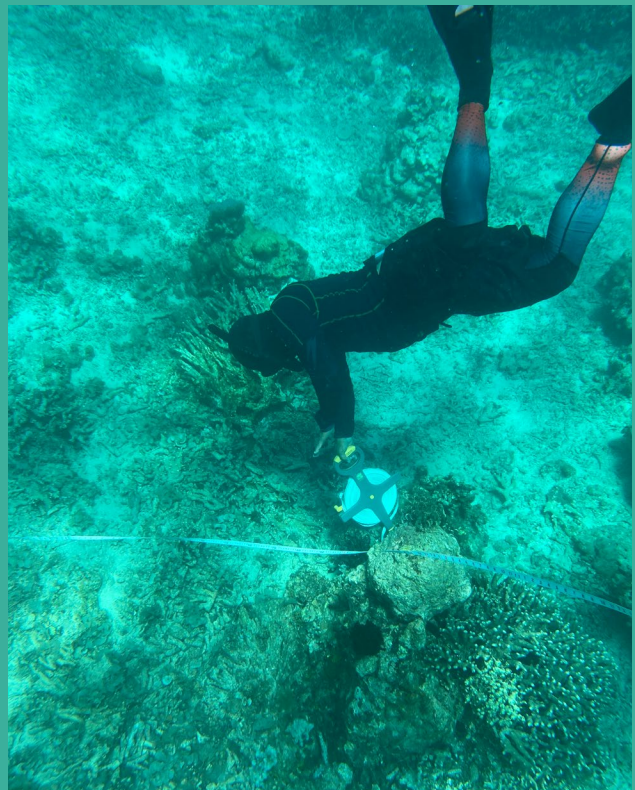
Into the Deep: Monitoring the Reefs of Danjungan

Monitoring the reef and marine environment around Danjungan Island is crucial in assessing the health of the reef, identifying threats, and taking steps to protect it.

Danjungan's local monitoring team Carmela Ellaga, Ryman Armada, Jufel Lontes, and Franz Alejano participated in a training of trainers for MPA-FishMAApp that helped them in conducting a fish visual census (FVC) in the reefs around Danjungan and Bulata in Cauayan, Negros Occidental.

MPA-FishMAApp is a tool designed for citizen scientists to easily and effectively gather information about various fish species. This tool features a user-friendly interface that permits individuals to input and store data concerning 21 different reef fish types and two groups of invertebrate species. Through the utilization of internal algorithms, MPA-FishMAApp can subsequently produce visual representations of the collected data, illustrating patterns in fish population and biomass, as well as alterations over a period of time.

The FVC conducted last April 1-2, 2023 revealed that fish biomass inside the sites found in three sanctuaries or MPA are significantly higher than the fished sites around the island and across the mainland in Bulata. This indicates that the fish populations inside the MPAs may



have become abundant and larger in size since sanctuaries provide opportunities for fish to grow and repopulate. Consequently, it also suggests that the high fish biomass in sanctuaries around Danjungan can potentially seed larvae to other areas in the larger network of MPAs in Southern Negros.

Antipara - an underwater mapping and analytics company - led a survey to create habitat maps of the prospective sites for the West Visayas Dive Circuit which include Danjungan Island. Funded by the Department of Tourism, this is a historic partnership that will allow us to assess Danjungan's marine habitats.

The survey for habitat mapping and 3D site scanning commenced on February 1, 2023 using a Shark Scan System and calibrated underwater camera arrays and georeferenced underwater ground control points, respectively.

It's a promising initiative that could benefit PRRCFI's reef monitoring efforts around Danjungan and the neighboring coastal areas in Bulata. This will give us an overview of the status of marine habitats in terms of the extent of the areas covered by live hard corals, sea grass, macro algae, rocks, sand, etc. Moreover, the 3D map will provide us with a precise and measurable 3D model of Danjungan's reefs.#





Connected by the Ocean: Beyond Virtual Island Adventures

It all started with a story of adventure- what Danjugan Island is, what PRRCFI is doing to protect it, and all the amazing wildlife that can be found in its pristine paradise.

What followed were actual adventures- some LMAX Group employees flying from across the world to reach us and our communities.

There were three virtual island experiences that were done through 1-hour Zoom sessions that each had a 30-minute audio-visual presentation and 30-minute discussion panel. The first was the Danjugan Island Story, the second one was the Virtual Island Tour, and the last one was the Family Island Adventure.

Through these virtual island experiences, some volunteers from LMAX Group helped out with our activities. Tim Turner, the Chief Information Officer at LMAX Group, and Victor Cabrera, Junior Internal Auditor of LMAX Group, helped out with the Giant Clam Survey. Aidan Alberico, Senior Corporate Responsibility Partner of LMAX Group, visited the Island to witness the community debut of Bagis II- the Sea Patrol Boat, and joined the community culmination and mentoring with the scholars.#

Certified Lifesavers

Training community rescuers





5 balsa / boat operators and 5 Danjugan Staff went through a 5-day training and certification for Special Swim and Survive / Aquatic Lifesaver (SSAS), a prerequisite in compliance with the Philippine Coast Guard.

This training was undertaken on August 1-5 for the operators to be equipped with swimming, surviving, and rescuing skills; to understand efficient use of different life saving equipment & first aid training materials; and to establish responsible ecotourism in the emerging balsa industry, so we can collectively take care of marine life and the communities relying on it.

The participants were trained to increase their water skills competency, to improve water entries and exits, and to practice survival strategies and techniques including first aid to drowning people.

They were also trained with the use of rescue tubes, Personal Floatation Device (PFD), spineboards, and throw lines.



All trained lifesavers successfully completed the qualification requirements and assessments for Cardio-Polmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Care to include the use of Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Ambu Bag and Oxygen Therapy.



Conservation Through Tourism

A Training on Sustainable Tour Guiding and Operations

All tourism should be sustainable- especially in the context of our dwindling natural resources and exacerbating impacts of climate change. Easier said than done, certainly, because we must all start somewhere and share what we have learned. At this point in time, the primary goal of tourism is to balance the community's need for livelihood and paving the way for tourists' appreciation and conservation of nature.

Last October, 22 participants including balsa operators and ecotourism service providers in Bulata had a 2-day training on Sustainable Tour Guiding and Operations. Our local island staff served as resource





persons and mentors to the participants, sharing the best practices of the Island in sustainability and guest experience.

The goal of the training is for businesses and service providers to align with sustainable practices for conservation, and practice good governance of shared resources. The training includes experiential modules for snorkeling and birdwatching guides, guest welfare and safety, and climate change education.

By the end of the training, they had produced

a consolidated draft of Bulata Tourism Situational analysis, and they were also able to identify and develop tour itineraries and activities for Bulata community-based tourism.

One of the challenges faced during the training is that some outputs of the training are dependent on prepared data coming from the municipal tourism and LGU- especially in the tourism situational analysis and creating an itinerary for Bulata Tourism. It will also be helpful to provide pre-filled templates and relevant documents for the participants to study in advance.



The End, The Beginning: Storytelling with ACE Bulata Youth Campers





"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince

We have come to the end of the first year of Project ACE, yet it is only really the beginning of a lifetime of change, impact, and a thousand little dreams fulfilled. At any chapter in the story we're co-creating, it is essential to be wide-eyed in awe- to look at each other, to feel our communities with us, and to hear the sound of a thousand stars laughing in delight at all the things we have done and all that we are yet to do.

On the afternoon of June 25, our young people from Brgy. Bulata read excerpts from "Ang Gamay nga Prinsipe", the Hiligaynon translation of The Little Prince. It is a classic children's tale on what is truly essential- that the most important things in life cannot be seen or measured, but must be felt with the heart.







This storytelling session was a reminder of what we aim for Project ACE: that the impact of what we do will be felt by the lush forests and reefs of the island, by the creatures that call it home, by the communities surrounding it, and by the youth that will continue to live out their dreams for a sustainable future.

As Fox said to the Little Prince, ““You become responsible, forever, for what you take care of.”

May we take care of our communities and our environment, just as much as they have taken care of us.#





Actions for Communities and Environment



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Rhoda Avanzado Phillips

Funder Relations / Liaison with LMAX Group

Kaila Ledesma Trebol

Science and Education

Sef Alba Carandang

Community Development

PROJECT ACE TEAM

Dave Albao

Executive Director

Franz Anthony Alejano

Project Officer

Carmela Ellaga

Community Officer

Maria Jaya Ariola

Communications Officer

Ruer Torculas

Graphic and Layout Artist

Photo Credits in Order of Appearance

Arsen Vargas

Celestine Noelle

Ryman Gonzaga Armada

Dev Albao

Franz Anthony Alejano

Lop Miranda


Bernie Coronado

Gerry Ledesma

Robert "Bobbit" Suntay

Georgievic Cruz





With endings come new beginnings indeed. We are thrilled that LMAX Group, PRRCFI, and Communities for Nature will continue with Project ACE for its 2nd year- a testament to the values of sustainability our organizations uphold.

For Year 2, we will focus on deepening our partnership with the community of Bulata through sustainable livelihood and community development. We will also continue supporting our ACE Sustainability Scholars and involve them both in environmental and community activities. There will also be a community hackathon for young people, communities, and partners to work collaboratively towards finding sustainable solutions to environmental and climate-related challenges. We will also train and engage with citizen scientists from our communities to help with the Giant Clam monitoring.

The essence of Project ACE is communities, and conserving the environment for current and future generations. It is with deepest joy and gratitude that we can continue this wonderful work with them leading the way.



Actions for Communities and Environment

