



EmpowerEb Siargao

An Educational Coastal Conservation Initiative







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As the Co-Founder and Director of Oceanus Conservation, I am deeply honored to present the outcomes of the Marine Youth Camp held on the beautiful island of Siargao. This initiative united passionate local youth leaders, each with a shared commitment to safeguard our marine ecosystems. These young leaders were equipped with the knowledge, skills, and inspiration necessary to become stewards of our oceans and catalysts for positive change in their communities. The camp not only fostered a deeper understanding of coastal conservation but also strengthened the next generation to take action to protect our natural resources.

Every species plays a fundamental role in maintaining the delicate balance on which all life depends. Losing even a single species can lead to serious, unpredictable disruptions as a whole. We all need to remember what is at stake. As Baba Dioum wisely said at the 1968 IUCN General Assembly in New Delhi:

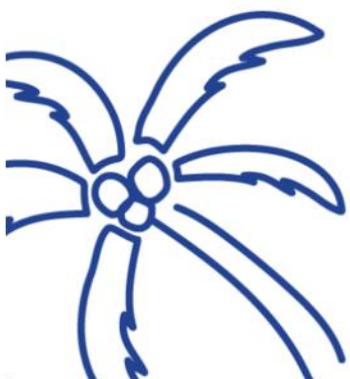
“In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”

His words, though spoken over five decades ago, remain a timeless reminder of the critical role education plays in conservation. **Educate to be able to conserve, conserve to be able to live.**

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the people who made this marine camp possible. I am deeply grateful to our partners—the Forest Foundation Philippines and Maison Bukana—whose support and collaboration were instrumental in bringing this camp to life. Additionally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our sponsors, from local business resorts to the LGU Del Carmen, whose generosity and commitment made this experience a reality for the youth leaders of Siargao.

And finally to the whole team of Oceanus for their unwavering passion and commitment to marine conservation and awareness.

Frances Camille Rivera
Executive Director, Co-founder
Oceanus Conservation







**Forest
Foundation
Philippines**

Let's grow together.

MESSAGE

We are gratified and optimistic to share the outcomes of our EmpowerED Siargao Camp held in partnership with Oceanus Conservation, our grantee, through this publication. Witnessing the enthusiasm and commitment of these young Siargaonans, including Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials, reassures us that the future of our country's forests and coastal ecosystems is truly in good hands.

Our efforts in the Siargao Island Protected Landscape and Seascape (SIPLAS) are not just about conserving diverse ecosystems — they are also about nurturing the next generation of forest advocates. This camp was an opportunity for us to build the capacity of local youth leaders, equipping them with the knowledge and tools they need to become advocates in their own right. They learned firsthand about the complexity and beauty of coastal ecosystems, participated in citizen science activities, and even planted 120 mangrove seedlings as a living testament to their commitment.

The impact of this initiative goes beyond this camp. We are particularly proud of the educational workbook that we developed through the project, which encapsulates the conservation messages and strategies from the camp, serving as a blueprint for other coastal communities to replicate and learn from.

SIPLAS is a critical conservation area that spans 835,648 hectares and is home to unique biodiversity. Our youth leaders now understand that protecting this area means protecting their future and the future of the generations to come. With their newfound knowledge, skills, and network, we are confident that they will become formidable allies in protecting and conserving the rich natural heritage of SIPLAS.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our partners, USAID SIBOL, Protected Area Management Office of SIPLAS, Maison Bukana, and local government and enterprise partners, and of course, the young leaders who joined us. Your passion, trust, and commitment anchor our efforts as we continue to set solid roots for a better future.

Let's grow together.

Forest Foundation Philippines



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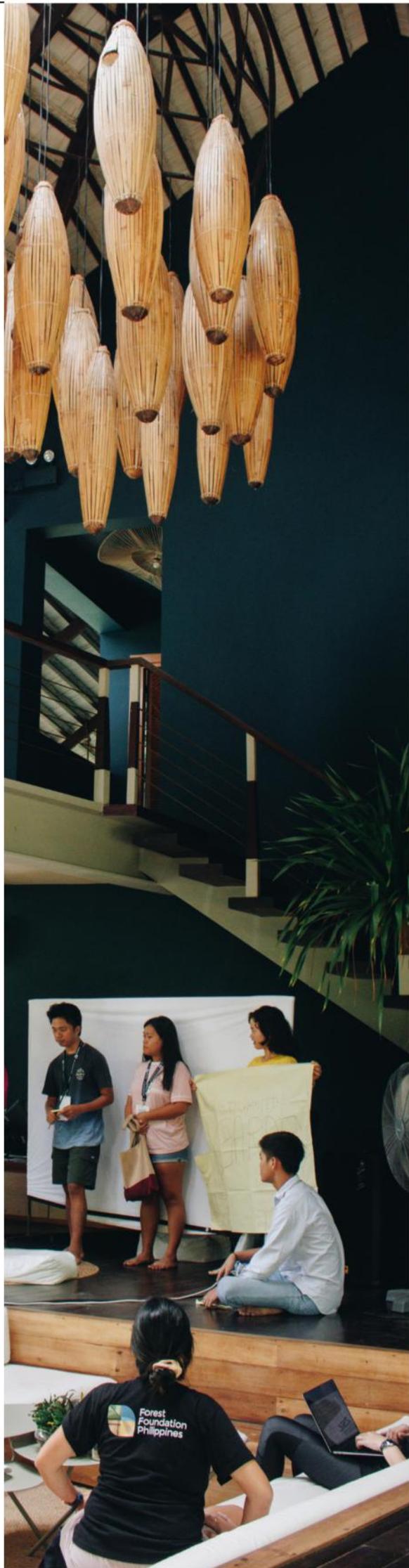
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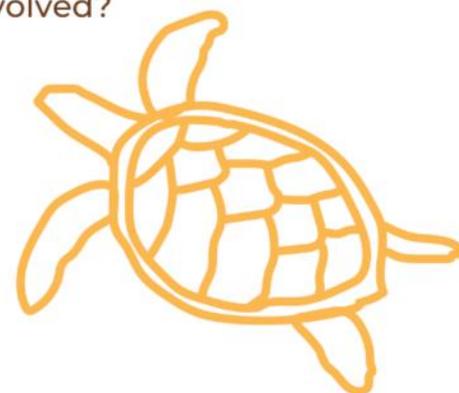
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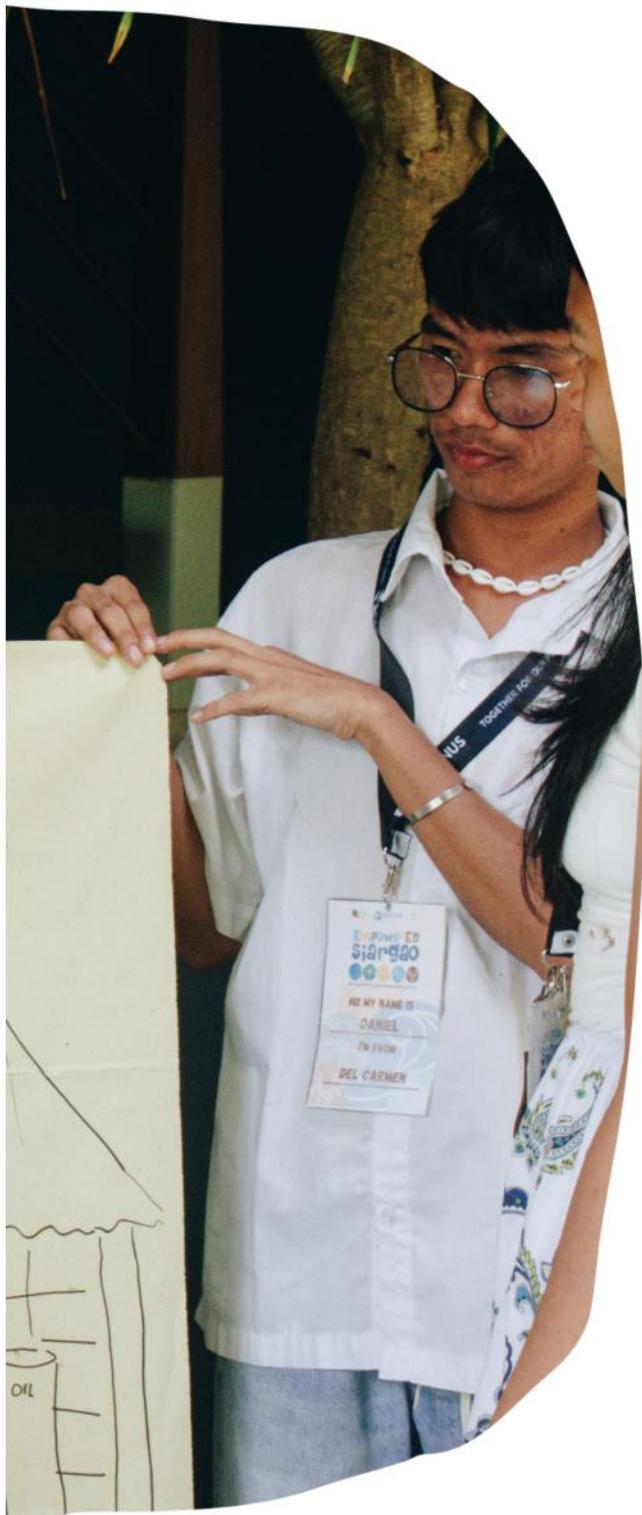
ABOUT

EmpowerED Siargao

The youth are a dynamic and influential part of Siargao Island, and they have a vital role to play in inspiring the entire community to safeguard the environment.

Our initiative goes beyond education. "EmpowerED Siargao" was chosen to reflect our commitment to empowering the youth through a sense of ownership and leadership. By emphasizing the word "empower," we convey our belief in the potential of the youth to drive positive change.

We hope that through these efforts, the youth of Siargao will already be empowered to take charge of the future of their island and take the lead in environmental conservation efforts. 🌱





OVERVIEW

SIPLAS, covering 835,648 hectares, represents 33.4 percent of the 10 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the Caraga Region and accounts for 21.7 percent of the total area of KBAs in Mindanao. SIPLAS includes the coastal and marine areas across nine municipalities: Burgos, Dapa, Del Carmen, General Luna, Pilar, San Benito, San Isidro, Santa Monica, and Socorro. These areas comprise vital ecosystems such as mangrove forests, seagrass beds, and coral reefs.

The EmpowerED Siargao project was an educational initiative focused on coastal conservation on Siargao Island, Surigao del Norte, Philippines.

The project aimed to involve young leaders in raising awareness about the ecological importance of Siargao Island and its conservation strategies. It aims to engage youth from various groups on the island to increase their understanding of coastal and marine resources and empower them to lead environmental projects.

With the central message,

"I am a citizen of a special/important place, SIPLAS, and I have a role, and I can lead, in protecting and conserving it, as well as the planet where we all live,"

the camp aimed to cultivate environmental leadership, encourage community-based projects, and promote collaboration between youth and non-profit organizations. 🌿



PARTICIPANTS



The project involved the active participation of 23 Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) and youth leaders from 8 municipalities in Siargao Island, all aged 16-24 years old. These participants are from the municipalities of General Luna, Socorro, San Isidro, Pilar, Burgos, Del Carmen, Sta. Monica, and Dapa.



They are active youth leaders, with some of them being members of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Federation in their municipality, active members of Bucas Grande Island Youth Volunteers in Socorro, PASALO Youth Club under Lokal Lab in Burgos, Del Carmen Youth Initiative, and student council organizations. 🌱





DAY 1 HIGHLIGHTS

On July 22-26, 2024, a group of 23 young leaders from Siargao Island engaged in a 5-day youth camp at Maison Bukana.

The first session of the camp was led by Ms. Jelanie Superada, Forest Technician II of DENR SIPLAS, who provided an overview of SIPLAS (Siargao Islands Protected Landscape and Seascapes). She highlighted that

“Siargao Island is identified as a protected area because of the diverse ecosystems from ridge to reef.”



Ms. Camille Rivera-Roa, the Executive Director of Oceanus Conservation and a marine biologist, delivered an enlightening presentation on coastal ecosystems. She emphasized the significance of coastal ecosystems and introduced the marine ecosystem in the area, highlighting the interconnectedness of various marine resources. Subsequently, the campers partook in an immersive ecosystems learning experience, exploring the mangroves and seagrass areas near Maison Bukana.





Jelanie Superada



Camille Rivera



Alessia Kockel





Dev Albao

Alessia Kockel, a marine conservation scientist, introduced the concept of participatory mapping on Siargao Island, involving collaboration with community members to gather map-based data on coastal habitats and related activities. 🌴



DAY 2 HIGHLIGHTS

Xyla Mercedita “Tat” Gualberto, co-founder of Ridge to Reef Young Leaders, Inc., shared her personal experience as a survivor of Typhoon Sendong and her commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change. She explained the Ridge to Reef concept and its significance for conservation efforts, emphasizing the interconnectedness of upland and lowland communities.

“Growing up, the river was always part of my childhood. Our culture, folklore, and history are embedded in that river. But in 2011, it changed because of a tropical storm called Sendong. It was a traumatic experience for me and it tainted my happy outlook and my happy memories of the river that I grew up with.



It was when I r

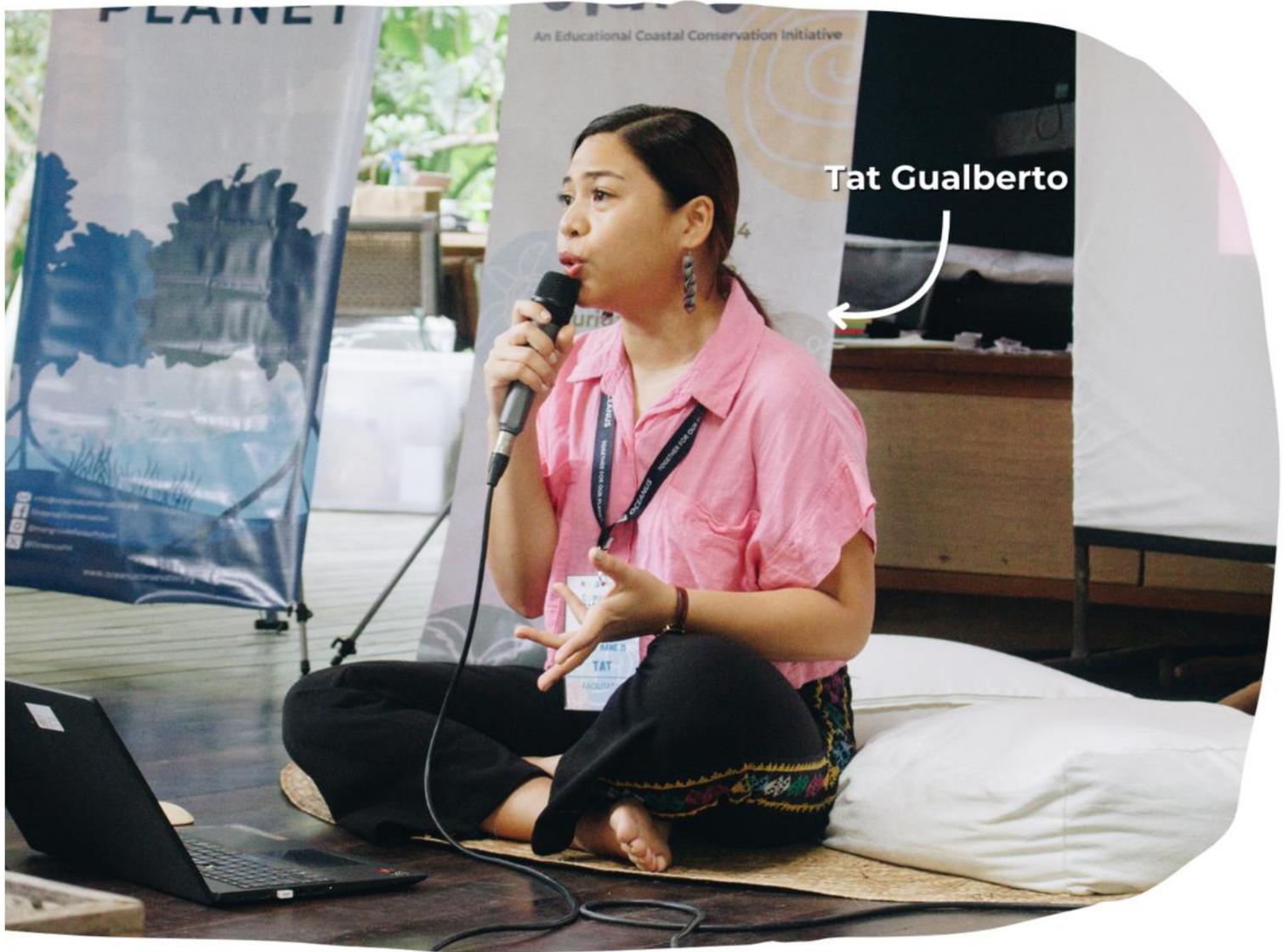
*We are not just living in
dictated by the activities u*



Camille further discussed the the concept of citizen science, highlighting the importance of validation before monitoring an area.

“Citizen scientists don't have to be scientists. It is an approach wherein you collect data and involve researchers, students, and other citizens. You are the leaders of your area. Don't undervalue your local knowledge. You are valuable in your areas because you know what is happening on the ground.” 





Tat Gualberto

I realized that our lives are tied to our landscape and other stakeholders.

in our own little comfortable world in the city, but little do we know, our fate is also upstream. The ridge, the river, and the reef are connected. It is not just one area that we are trying to protect."



The participants then engaged in a field exposure activity, practicing the learnings they had acquired on citizen science, and a beach clean-up activity at Secret Beach.

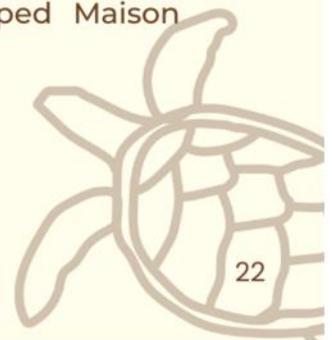
The campers also participated in an interactive activity where each team constructed their own "dream" islands using natural found objects and created infrastructure for natural and cultural heritage, water and food security, energy, waste management, and livelihood. After a debrief, participants reflected on the importance of taking action for the environment and the limited time available to do so.





“This dream island represents community action. If there is destruction, do you think it is going to be hopeless? I don't know if I am able to see a world without climate change, or that we have resolved all the environmental issues of our time. However, what I know and what I am happy about, is that I am doing action with the community that I have built. And for me, that's what matters. To my last breath, I know that I've done something. I contributed to this island that I have dreamed about. The relationships that I have built with people, that is what's important. To have that feeling of being together and working together, no matter what the result is. The dream island is a vision that we are all together.”

In another input session on Island Sustainability, Christophe Bariou, the owner of Maison Bukana, shared their advocacy for a sustainable Siargao. He shared how they developed Maison Bukana as environmentally friendly as possible. 🌿







DAY 3 HIGHLIGHTS

The campers simulated a public hearing activity of participatory governance through role-play facilitated by Dev Albao, a Programmes Manager at The Reef-World Foundation.

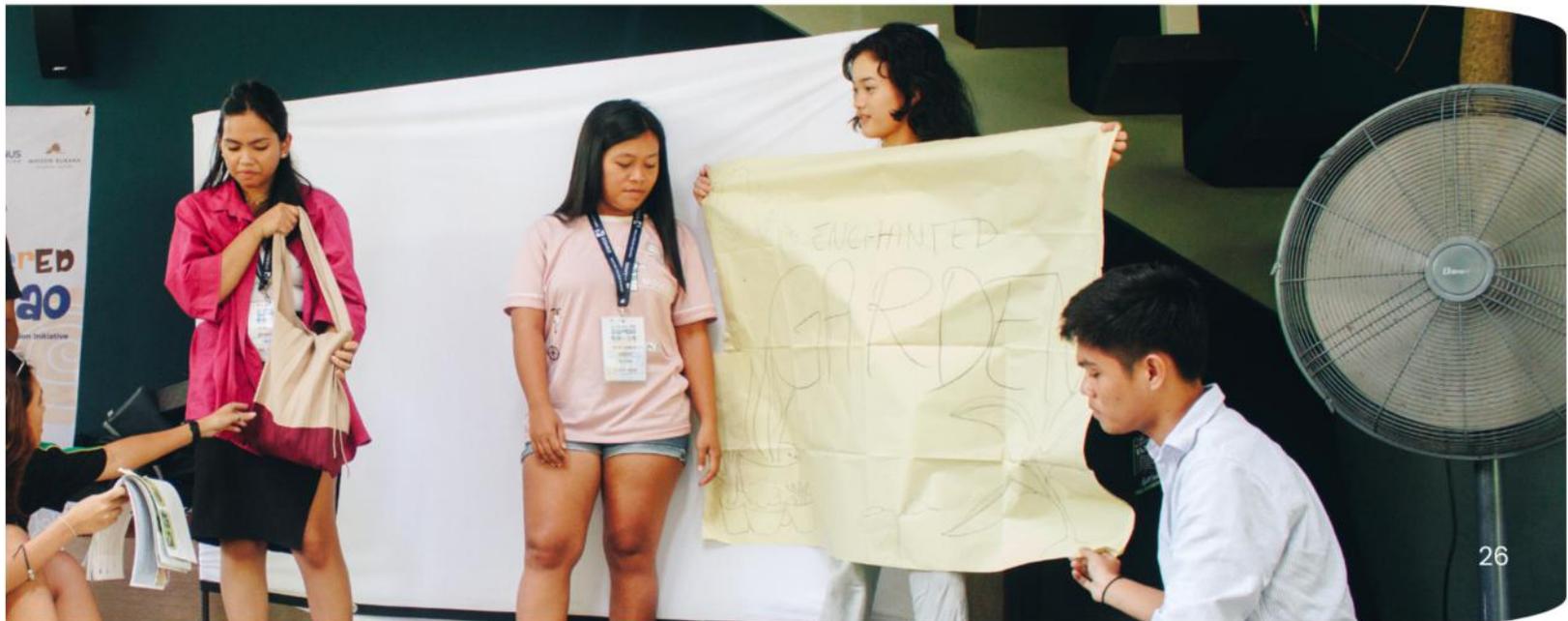
Iris Aroa, co-founder of Lokal Lab, delivered a talk on "Understanding Circular Economy and Waste Management in Island Communities." She covered essential concepts such as the circular economy, zero waste, and sustainability. She also highlighted Siargao's solid waste management practices, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities for island communities.

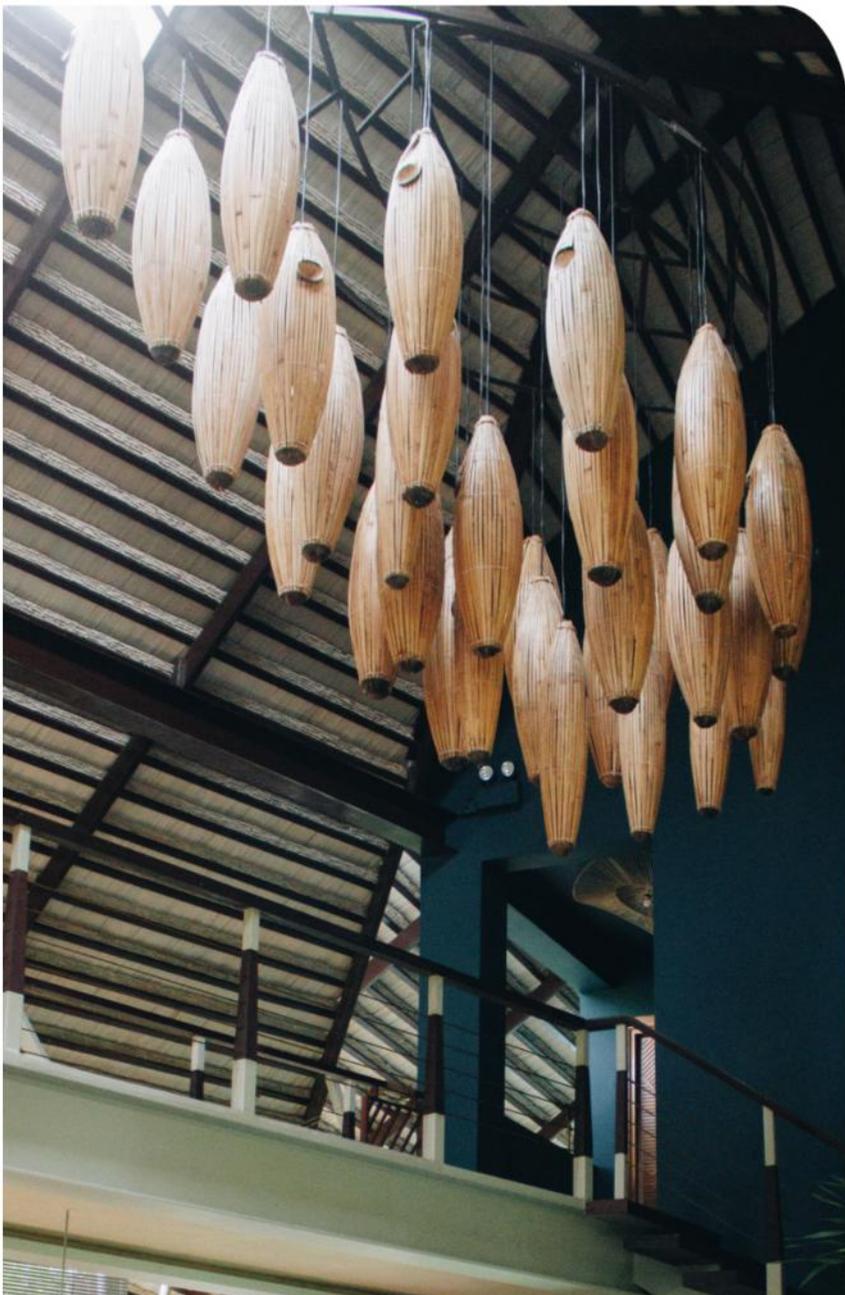
"Sustainability is us being able to meet our needs for now, without compromising the ability of the future generation to also meet their needs."

Circular economy is inspired by nature because with nature, everything cycles. You are the future of this island, do not let the older generation solely dictate what will happen because you will inherit this. Do not be afraid to speak up and start small. One way to encourage the older generation is to remind them that this is how they did things before, and this is how nature is thriving."

Another input session was led by Lady Carmel "Ladz" Litang, a young leader from Siargao, where she shared her journey as the founder of Halian Seawikan, a conservation project focused on protecting sea turtle nesting grounds in Brgy. Halian, Del Carmen, Siargao Island. Her impactful presentation inspired campers to take action for environmental and marine conservation.









"This is where I learned that I always wanted to do something for our community. I want to serve our community because this island is where my dreams began. I want to give back to the island that inspired those dreams.

It is our home. It is our responsibility to protect the place of our ancestors. It is where our dreams began, and it is also the foundation of who we are today."

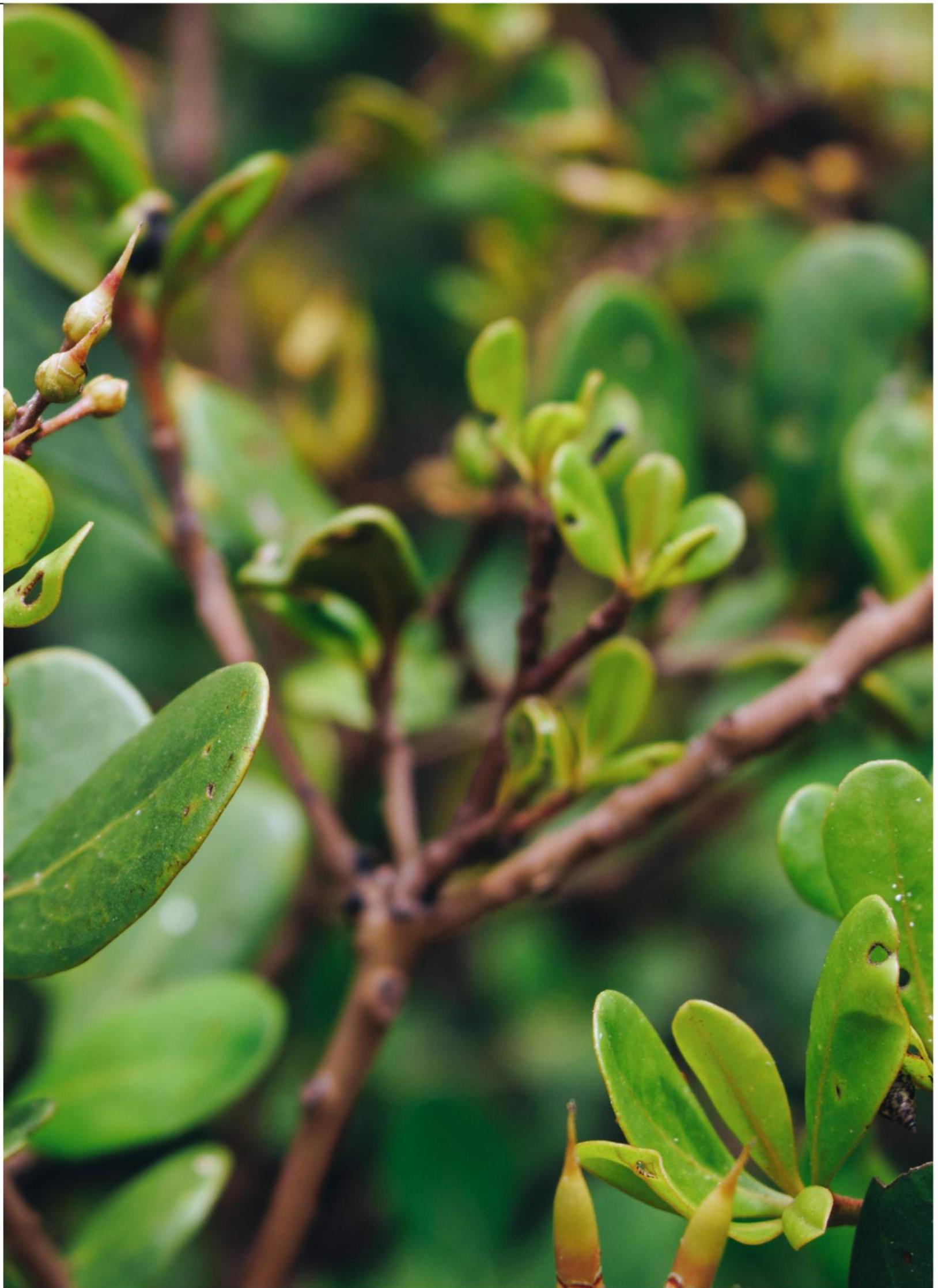
Alan Kristofer "Blue" Motus, a visual communicator, delivered a presentation on conservation storytelling, emphasizing the power of photography in conveying stories and messages. He discussed the role of social media in storytelling and led a hands-on photography activity for campers.

We also held an engaging session led by Joan Abes from the Forest Foundation Philippines and Camille Rivera, where they demonstrated the essential steps in project proposal development and pitching. The session left the youth leaders feeling inspired and empowered, providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively develop and present their projects. 📷





IN PHOTO:
Aegiceras floridum
Local name: Saging-saging

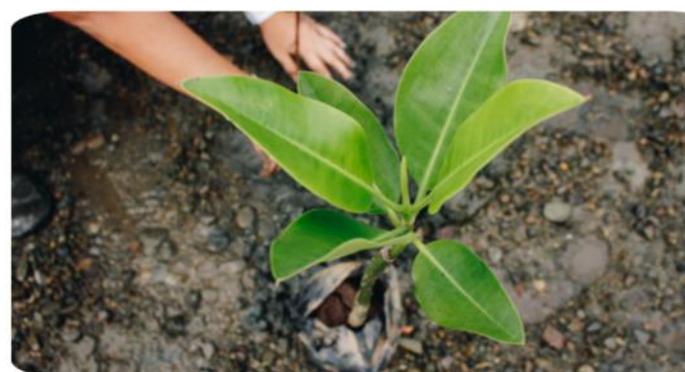




DAY 4 HIGHLIGHTS

In celebration of International Mangrove Day, the campers had a field exposure activity where we successfully planted around 120 mangrove saplings with the help of our community partner for this activity, the T-Arlan Protected Fisherfolks Association (TAPFA) in the Municipality of Santa Monica. The species of mangroves planted included *Avicennia sp.* and *Rhizophora sp.*

As this was also the last night of the camp, we had a 'Pledge Night' where we had several activities prepared for the campers which involved facilitated discussions to process the journey of the campers throughout the program, and finding common ground or shared experiences among campers despite individual differences. Following these activities, Christophe Bariou delivered a short inspirational talk about the "hummingbird story," conveying that young people have a great role in our society.





"None of us are too small to act. Don't be afraid. Just focus on what you can do, and just do it. There are so many things we cannot control, but you just have to be the change you want to see in the world."

After the speech, the campers wrote down their "pledge to nature" and their "pledge to SIPLAS" on a piece of paper, signifying their promise to their island. After the pledge activity, the campers enjoyed a talent night where they shared their talents in music, singing, and dancing. 🎵











HIGHLIGHTS DAY 5

On the last day of the camp, seven groups participated in project pitching. Each group presented their project, and they received valuable feedback and comments from Camille Rivera of Oceanus Conservation, as well as our partners from Forest Foundation Philippines, Abegail Pasion, and Samantha Cayona.





TEAMS



Team Sikap Seacow



Team Bakwikan





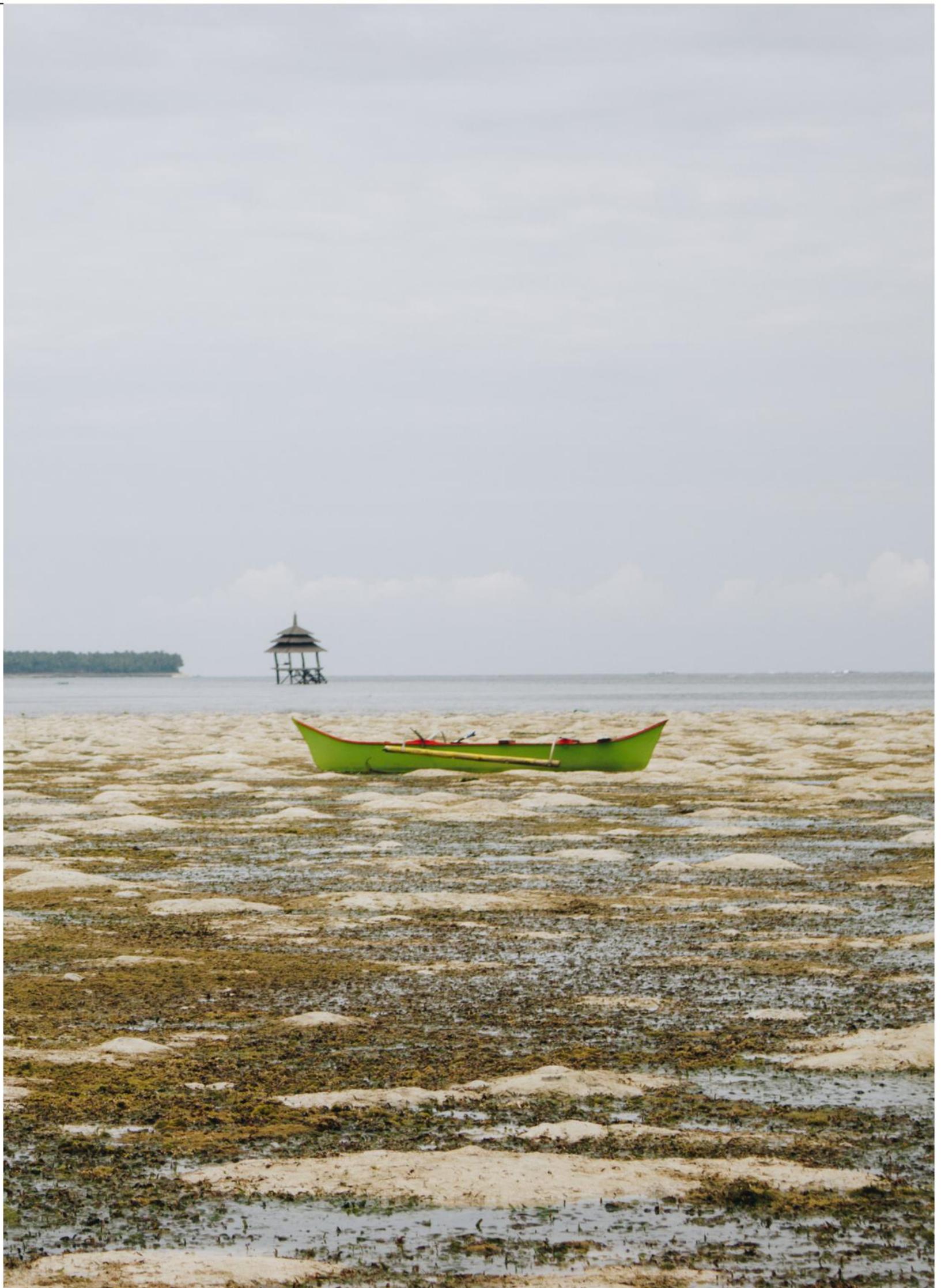
Team Bini_LAMANG



Team Jelly







EMPOWERED SIARGA O IMPACT

488

PIECES OF TRASH
COLLECTED THROUGH A
BEACH CLEANUP ACTIVITY

9

RESOURCE SPEAKERS C
ENVIRONMENTAL
CONSERVATION
COLLABORATED

5

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED

23

SANGGUNIANG KABATAAN
(SK) & YOUTH LEADERS
ENGAGED

**Empow
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1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT
SUPPORTED THE CAUSE

50

DATA POINTS GAT
FOR MANGROV
SEAGRASS THRU
CITIZEN SCIEN



23

EDUCATIONAL
WORKBOOKS DISTRIBUTED

7

CORE TEAM MEMBERS
TRAINED FOR CAMP
FACILITATION

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42%

INCREASE IN KNOWLEDGE
OF THE CAMPERS

10

PRIVATE ESTABLISHMENTS
SUPPORTED THE CAMP

0

GATHERED
OVES &
THROUGH
IENCE



120

MANGROVE SAPLINGS
PLANTED



PARTICIPANT'S TESTIMONIALS

I've always been the quiet, reflective type—someone who finds peace in nature, especially the ocean, but feels uneasy in crowds. My love for the sea has fueled my commitment to its protection, though I've always preferred to work quietly in the background. During this camp, I met people who shared this passion, yet they were everything I'm not—outgoing, bold, and full of confidence. Instead of feeling out of place, I found warmth in their acceptance. They helped me see that it's perfectly fine to be myself. I left not only with a deeper understanding of ocean conservation but also with newfound friendships and the comforting realization that even the softest voices can create waves of change. It was an experience that reassured me: I don't have to change who I am to make a difference; I simply have to care, and that's enough.

Jozzy Tan



*I'm truly grateful for the opportunity given to me as I was able to experience this youth camp. It allowed me to build myself better in different aspects and I became more connected to the environment. I was able to meet youth leaders from different parts of Siargao that are dedicated to the conservation of our island's marine ecosystem. As the president of our school's environment organization, I'm willing to share my acquired knowledge and experiences. **Salamat Karajaw, EmpowerED Siargao!** 🌊💚*

Xian Cruz



If it wasn't for the camp, I would not have understood that my connection with the ocean goes beyond mere attachment; it is grounded in rights and responsibilities to make decisions that ensure a healthy ocean. It made me reflect on how my deep-rooted connection and identity as a Siargaonon drive me to view the ocean as an integral part of myself—an identity that empowers me to take action to protect it.

Alyssa Polvorosa



EmpowerED Siargao ignited a fire within me that I never knew existed. As a student leader and a local youth, I've always felt a deep desire to find sustainable solutions for our island, which is under increasing threat be it natural or man-made. The camp connected me with incredible young Siargaonons who share the same passion for serving their community. Through inspiring lectures, interactive activities, and hands-on experiences like exploring mangroves and seagrass, I gained a newfound appreciation for these vital ecosystems. I realized that these plants are more than just flora; they are essential components of our island's health. By understanding their unique roles, we can better care for them and ensure a sustainable future for our community.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who supported and contributed to the success of this project. Our sincere gratitude to our partners **Maison Bukana and Forest Foundation Philippines**, for their collaboration and commitment.

To our sponsors from **Harana Surf Resort and Bayani Restaurant, Wild Restaurant, Ver De, Kanaloa, Caracoa, Sophie Siargao Restaurant and Catering Services, Magwai Philippines, Viajero Outdoor Centre, and Siago Beach Resort** for their generous support and invaluable resources. Special thanks are due to the government units, particularly the **Local Government Unit of Del Carmen through the Local Youth Development Office and Protected Area Management Office (PAMO) of SIPLAS**, for their essential assistance and guidance throughout the project. Your collective contributions were crucial in achieving our goals and ensuring the smooth execution of this endeavor.

We would like to express our gratitude to our youth volunteers: **Annika Silayan, Gianna Silayan, Julianna Limjoco, and Rianna Remulla** for their active support during the 5-day camp. We also extend our thanks to our camp facilitators: **Lady Carmel Litang, Xyla Mercedita Gualberto, and Alessia Kockel**, as well as our Head Facilitator and host, **Danny Jeff Porras**, and our camp consultant and facilitator, **Dev Albao**.





HOW CAN YOU BE INVOLVED?

We always welcome individuals from diverse backgrounds and expertise who share our common goal. Whether you're a scientist, graphic artist, engineer, or businessman, there's a place for your environmental passion to contribute.

Reach out to us at info@oceanusconservation.org to connect and support our ongoing projects.

You can also make a difference by donating any amount to sustain our efforts in wetland conservation and restoration, ocean education, and community development.

We accept PayPal and bank transfers (USD and PHP).

Philippine Pesos Account

Oceanus Conservation Inc.

Account number: **141110056245**

Bank Postal Address: 2233 Chino Roces Ave. Makati City, Metro Manila 1231, Philippines

SWIFT number: PNBMPHMM



Paypal Link



Website Link

IN PHOTO:

Pemphis acidula

Local name: Bantigue

(Locally threatened species due to bonsai trade)



OCEANUS TEAM

Frances Camille Rivera-Roa
Executive Director

Emmanuel Cababarro, Jr.
Project Officer for Marketing
and Logistics

Mark Auditor
Project Officer for Logistics

Angela Mariz Obsina
Project Lead

Ma. Sharlene Reyanne S. Mercado
Project Officer for Communications and
Marketing

As we conclude our very first youth camp on the beautiful island of Siargao, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our incredible volunteers, facilitators, speakers, partners from Maison Bukana and Forest Foundation Philippines, our dedicated team at Oceanus, and most especially to the youth leaders of Siargao Island who made this camp possible. Everyone's involvement and enthusiasm since the beginning of this camp have been the driving force behind this success, creating a lasting impact on Siargao Island and our environment.

To the youth leaders, you have not only learned about the importance of coastal conservation but you have also greatly inspired your fellow youth through each one of your commitment and leadership. Thank you for sharing with us your passion throughout the camp. You are our environment's stewards, and always remember that your contributions are invaluable!

Coastal conservation is a collective effort, and we would like to invite everyone to continue this important work for Siargao Island. By supporting local initiatives and spreading awareness about the importance of our environment, we can all make a meaningful difference.

Together, let us protect the beauty that Siargao Island has to offer for future generations. Thank you for being part of this journey! Together for our planet.







Together for our planet.