

# Student Leadership Role for Environmental Protection

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**Abstract** - *The research focuses on the role of student organizations in the promotion of environmental education and protection. It assessed the student organizations' initiatives and activities that address the environmental issues and problems. It determined whether student leadership can be an effective tool in addressing environmental concerns and promote environmental education. Descriptive evaluative methods of research were used in the study. Documentary analysis was used to determine the programs, projects and activities conducted by the different student organizations along environmental education and protection. Interview and focused group discussions were employed to validate the secondary data and identify problems and constraints encountered by the organization. Results of the study showed that the University supports student leadership through the student organizations. Student organizations are empowered and given rights and privileges as stipulated in the student handbook. There were more than forty accredited student organizations in CBSUA. All of them initiated programs/projects and activities that are environment related as required by the university. Student leadership through student organizations is an effective tool in promoting environmental education and protection. Student empowerment through student organizations can promote student involvement in the most pressing concerns of environment protection.*

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is widely regarded as one of the most serious challenges the world faces with consequences that post greater effects on the environment. Since the environment is not restricted to boundaries of different countries, it might as well mean that no country or individual will escape the effects of such climate catastrophe [1]. As environmental concerns escalate around the globe, people are taking actions like never before. A lot of attention is being focused on the environment [2] and all sectors collaborate to be able to help and take part in the most pressing concerns.

Young people are one of the most promising sectors of the society. They can be promoters of change, young as they are because of their natural dynamism and will power, they can bring fresh perspective, energy, drive and a sense of what is possible [3]. Youth in the academe, being educated and informed have greater opportunity to be involved and take part in addressing environmental concerns. There's much we can do to learn and support their efforts.

Young people constitute a large part of the world's population [4]. Demographic statistics reveal that children under 15 comprise nearly one-third of the world's total population with 60 percent of them living in Asia. Because of this, children and youth groups are becoming major factor for involvement in environmental work. In Bangladesh for example, through the National Federation of Youth Organization in Bangladesh (NFYOB), empowered the youth by providing relevant trainings. Many youth groups work directly on environmental awareness and participation among the young [5].

Undoubtedly, the youth can significantly perform vital roles in the society. It is imperative that youth from all parts of the world participate actively in all relevant levels of decision-making processes because it affects their lives today and has implications for their futures [6]. In addition to their intellectual contribution and ability to mobilize support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account.

The youth are agents of change. They are the hope of the present and next generations to come [7]. Aside from having greater stake in the more distant future, young people are especially well-placed to promote environmental awareness simply because they often have better access to information about the environment than their elders [4]. Aside from exposure in formal education, youth of today have lived all their lives in an era in which environmental issues have loomed large.

Youth participation in all societal concerns has long been noted. Many success stories about young peoples' participation in environmental advocacy have been told. Website of the Philippine Center for Environmental Protection and Sustainable

Development, Inc; reflected youth participations in environmental advocacies through the Green Youth Movement of the Philippines [8]. GYM Philippines believed that the Filipino youth should be involved in green initiatives because a) they comprises 30% of the country's population, b) they are vulnerable to environmental degradation and disasters, c) they will inherit the responsibility of taking care of the environment, d) has high intellectual capacity for green initiatives, and e) has strong ability to mobilize. Youth mobility may be enhanced when working as a group.

Student organizations may present opportunities for collaboration. It can help build network and can provide valuable skills [9], and invaluable experiences [10] that they can contribute in the implementation of environmental protection advocacy. Involving student leaders contribute in shaping organizational goals [11].

Involving students in educational reforms is a practical thing to do. They have unique knowledge and perspectives that can make reform efforts more successful [11]. Involving students in environmental advocacy may lead to successful implementation of environmental protection and advocacies because to involve students is to involve energy and enthusiasm [12].

Student organizations may provide a successful tool in accelerating the development towards aware and motivated students. Its members may play an active part in the transformation towards a sustainable society [13]. Environmental education and protection advocacy must include students as visionaries and creative thinkers because by doing so, new possibilities and options may be found [14].

Students are change agents [15]. They are part of sustainable development efforts [12]; a producer of school outcomes and their involvement is fundamental to all improvement [11]. Their inputs, leadership and decision making were in the forefront of environmental education activities [16]. No doubt, the youth of today through student organizations can be an important tool in the promotion of environmental education and protection. It is therefore worthy to look at the environmental initiatives of student organizations in academic institutions.

The research focuses on the role of student organizations in the promotion of environmental education and protection. It particularly assessed the Central Bicol State University of Agriculture (CBSUA) student organizations' initiatives and activities that address environmental issues and problems, c/y 2015 to 2016. It determined whether student leadership can be an effective tool in addressing environmental concerns and promote environmental education. The study aimed to determine the University policies and legal basis on student organizations; determine the profile of the accredited student organizations in CBSUA for the year 2015 to 2016; identify the student organizations that are actively involved in environmental advocacy and protection; assess the impact of the student leaders participation to organizations' initiatives and activities that address environmental issues and problems to their attitude towards environmental protection; identify problems and constraints encountered by the organizations in implementing environment related initiatives; and assess whether student leadership can be an effective tool in addressing environmental concerns and promote environmental education.

## **METHODS**

Descriptive-evaluative methods of research were used in the study. Documentary analysis and survey were conducted to determine the organizational profile, programs, projects and activities conducted by the different student organizations along environmental education and protection. Interview and focused group discussions involving student leaders, organization officers, active members, and organization advisers were employed to validate the secondary data obtained from the office of the University Student Affairs and Services (OSAS).

### **Respondents**

The subject of the research was the top ten (10) student organizations of the forty-nine (49) OSAS accredited student organizations of CBSUA in 2015 to 2016 who were ranked based on active involved in environmental protection related activities. Key informants (KI) were the people that man the organizations, including CBSUA Student Affairs and Services (CBSUA-OSAS) personnel. The men behind the organization were the organization advisers, officers and active members. Some OSAS personnel were also included particularly the director and the student organization coordinator. They were the source of some pertinent information that included the university policies on student organization and the protocol for the conduct of activities among others.

### **Sampling Procedure**

There were a total of thirty- four (4) key informants (KI) involved in the Key Informant Interview (KII) identified through purposive sampling. Ten (10) organization advisers, 10 organization president, 10 active members, 1 OSAS Director, 1 student organization coordinator and 2 OSAS staff. Active members were identified by the organization adviser and the OSAS staffs were those designated to cater to the student organizations' concerns. Name of the key informants were withheld for ethical reasons.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Documentary analysis was conducted to determine the programs, projects and activities conducted by the different student organizations along environmental education and protection. Key Informant Interview (KII) and focused group discussions (FGD) involving student leaders, organization officers, active members, and organization advisers were employed to validate the secondary data obtained from the office of the University Student Affairs and Services. The FGD was conducted to validate the information noted in the interview.

Documents available at the OSAS consist of student organization profile, accomplishment reports, student handbook, activity proposal, activity permit and others were requested through the OSAS Director and student organization coordinator. The documents were sources of secondary data that were evaluated. Informal interview and focused group discussions (FGD) were conducted involving the key informants who were identified through purposive sampling. Discussions were focused on the organizational profile, programs/projects implemented, initiatives conducted, impact on student leaders' attitude towards environmental protection and problems encountered in the conduct of environment related initiatives.

Accomplishment reports of the ten (10) student organizations whose identity are withheld were used in the documentary analysis. Only valid and recognized documents filed at the University Office of Student Affairs and Services were used in the data gathering. Information generated from the KII were triangulated through the FGD to ensure reliability of research results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents discussions which were focused on a) University policies and legal basis on student organizations, b) profile of the accredited student organizations in CBSUA for the year 2015 to 2016, c) student organizations that are actively involved in environmental advocacy and protection, d) impact on student leaders' attitudes towards environmental protection, e) problems and constraints encountered by the organizations in implementing environment related initiatives, f) student leadership as an effective tool in addressing environmental concerns and promotion of environmental education.

### **University Policies on Student Organizations**

Student organization is one of the major components of student affairs and services of the Central Bicol State University of Agriculture. Chapter VI of the student handbook describes student organizations as groups of bona fide students united to promote the ideals and objectives of the University and serve as instruments of development [17]. Its organizational programs serve the students' needs to significantly advance the University's educational and social goals. It is facilitated by the Student Organization Coordinator and directly under the regulation of the OSAS.

Student organizations in CBSUA are classified into academic, civic, fraternities and sororities, and religious organizations. The University Supreme Student Council (USSC) is the umbrella organization of all accredited student organizations. It is the highest governing body of all students serving as voice of the students to the administration [17]. The council is empowered to perform functions that include among others, the coordination and provision of assistance to accredited organizations in the implementation of their activities. This implies that projects and activities of student organizations in the university are subject to the regulation and or approval of the USSC and overall supervision of the OSAS.

All bonafide students of the university are given equal rights to join any organization and or organize themselves into an organization. Any group of twenty-five (25) students may apply as an organization to the OSAS at the start of the semester, they just have to comply with the requirements stipulated in the University policies. Existing and accredited organizations are required to submit annual accomplishment report, financial report together with accomplished documents that include among others the a) annual workplan of activities for the school year, approved by the adviser; b) list of current officers and members with their names and addresses duly certified by the University Registrar; c) list of newly elected officers and advisers with pictures; d) class schedule of the current officers of the organization; ratified Constitution and By-Laws; e) Vision, Mission and Philosophy of the organization, and f) date, time and place of organization's meeting. The university requires activities for accreditation and re-accreditation that includes a) one activity highlighting the organization's purpose of existence; b) one activity of service learning in nature; c) one activity on popular issues and participation in all activities directly sponsored by the OSAS or its coordinating units. Organization adviser is required to device a monitoring and evaluation scheme. Corresponding policies on benefits and incentives, returning organizations, revocation of status, recognition and others are all stipulated on chapter VI of the Student Handbook.

### **Organizational Profile for 2015 to 2016**

Documents from the Office of Student Affairs and Services reflected University's full support to student organizations. Aside from the provisions stipulated in the student handbook that allows bona fide students to organize themselves for a common cause, the university allocated funds for student services, particularly on the capacity building of student leaders and support to student organization activities. The USSC is empowered in the management of the student development fund although; a protocol is prescribed for the purpose.

Data in table 1 revealed active involvement of students in organization. For 2015 to 2016 alone, there are more than forty accredited student organizations in CBSUA, of various classifications.

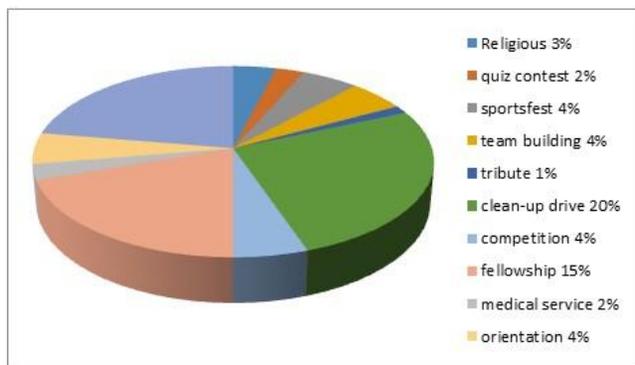
**Table 1. Profile of Accredited Student Organizations in CBSUA for 2015 to 2016**

| Classification          | Number of Organizations |           |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                         | 2015-2016               | 2016-2017 |
| College Student Council | 3                       | ---       |
| Academic Organizations  | 26                      | 29        |
| Civic Organizations     | 11                      | 7         |
| Religious Organizations | 2                       | 3         |
| Fraternity and Sorority | 7                       | 7         |

Profile of the accredited student organizations indicated that majority of the student organizations were academic in nature. The rest were civic organizations and a few were religious. Data likewise revealed existence of College Student Councils; these however were not renewed in 2016. Interview with the organization officers revealed minor reason for the non-renewal as time constraints due to overlapping academic involvement of the officers responsible for the preparation of documents necessary for reaccreditation.

**Student Organizations Involved in Environmental Advocacy and Protection**

There were more than forty (40) accredited student organizations in CBSUA for the years 2015 to 2016. All of these accredited organizations conducted at least one environment related activity as mandated by the University. Graph 1 presents the commonly conducted organizational activities for 2015 with the relative percentages.



*Graph 1: Student Organization Activities for 2015 (Source: OSAS Accomplishment Report for 2015)*

Data showed that all of these organizations were actively involved in activities that support the University's educational and social goals. Activities conducted include those that are educational (18%), religious (3%), quiz contest (2%), sportsfest(4%), team building (4%), tribute (1%), clean-up drive (20%), competition (4%), fellowship (15%), medical service (2%), orientation (4%) and outreach (17%).

It can be noted in graph 1 that clean-up drive is the most frequently conducted activity, comprising twenty percent (20%) of the totally conducted organizational activities for 2015 [18]. Educational, clean-up drive and outreach were the nature of activities that got higher percentage and were linked with environmental advocacy and protection.

Educational activities include training and seminars on environmental management and protection. Clean-up drive as noted from the organizational leaders was their way to help in maintaining ecological balance particularly in the preservation of natural habitat of flora and fauna, a clear manifestation of student concern for environmental protection.

Looking further into the documents provided by OSAS, it is reflected that most of the organizations were conducting at least one (1) environment related activity. This is so because it is a requirement for reaccreditation of the student organization. Analysis of the data revealed a number of organizations sponsoring activities that were mostly environment related. Collaboration among organizations is also evident. Table 2 (see appendix) gives the organizations that are actively involved in the promotion of environmental advocacy and protection with the specific environment related activities conducted.

As indicated in Table 2 (see appendix), organizations actively promoting environmental advocacy includes the League of Ecologists (LOE) with at least ten (10) activities conducted in 2015 alone; League of Elementary Teachers (LET) with 5 environment related activities conducted; Rotaract Club of Isarog, Physical and Biological Sciences Union (PBSSU) and Sarong Banggi Organization all with four (4) environment related activities conducted. Spirited Otakus' Ultimate League conducted three (3) environment related activities for 2015.

Data in table 2 further reflected that the top five student organizations actively promoting environmental advocacy and protection conducted activities such as clean-up drives in the university, estero, and coastal areas; tree planting and distribution of planting materials; waste analysis and characterization study (WACS); environmental advocacy seminars, waste management training seminar; pulotkalat; grin for green; community waste management training; container gardening; climate summit; and green CBSUA campaign photoshoot. Findings manifested awareness and concern of students towards environmental protection. The motive for environmental protection is evident in the conduct of environment related activities of the different organizations. Indeed, student leadership through the student organizations can be an effective tool for environmental advocacy and protection; their input, leadership and decision making were at the forefront of environmental education activities [16]. The youth dynamism and creativity added with better access to information [4], can bring about fresh perspective [3] that may lead to the promotion of environmental advocacy. CBSUA student leaders can be the University's partners in the promotion of environmental education and protection.

### **Impact of Participation to Environment Related Activities to the Attitude of Students Towards Environmental Protection**

Interview and focused group discussions conducted to student leaders, organization officers and advisers revealed positive impact of the conduct of environment related initiatives. Many of the respondents expresses enjoyment in participating at community-based activities such as tree planting and clean-up drives. It made them realize the importance of caring for the environment. One of the organization presidents shared that his constant participation to environment related activities started his advocacy for environmental protection. He is now actively encouraging and leading his friends to participate in environment related initiatives of their organization.

Another very remarkable response noted during the FGD was the transfer of knowledge and advocacy from the student organizations to the community. Majority of the FGD participants shared initiative of influencing their own family. Involvement were through waste segregation, water, energy conservation, recycling and backyard clean-up. There were also some who participates in community tree planting and “rabus”. Rabus is a community activity, bayanihan in nature, where community residents helped in doing certain tasks in the barangay as community clean-up and other similar activities.

Findings imply development of positive attitude towards environmental protection. This manifestation is consistent with learning principles stating that experience promote learning and learning results to change in behavior [19]-[20]. The experience of participating in environment related activities sponsored by the student organization foster awareness of the environmental issues among students thereby resulting to a change in their behavior. Student organizations can therefore be an effective partner in promoting environmental advocacy and protection.

Young people are one of the most promising sectors of the society. They can be promoters of change, young as they are because of their natural dynamism and will power, they can bring fresh perspective, energy, drive and a sense of what is possible [3]. Youth in the academe, being educated and informed have greater opportunity to be involved and take part in addressing environmental concerns.

### **Problems Encountered By Organization Leaders in the Conduct of Environment Related Initiatives**

Problems encountered by organization leaders in the conduct of environment related advocacies were mostly financial in nature. Other problems raised in the FGD were time constraints and protocol in requesting permit for the conduct of activity.

Financial problem was due to the limited organization fund. Requesting subsidy from the University Supreme Student Council (USSC) is difficult due to the limited fund allocation of USSC and many organizations and students sharing the resources. Time constraints was brought about by the overloading academic tasks of students involved. The tedious protocol and the many required documents relative to the conduct of an activity hindered realization of organizational plans.

### **Student Leadership as Tool in Addressing Environmental Concerns and Promotion of Environmental Education and Protection**

Results of the study strongly indicated potentials of student leaders in bringing about change. Through the student organization, young minds and youth dynamism bring about fresh perspectives that made things possible. With minimal adult supervision, the creativity of their minds and strong conviction to make a difference enabled them to take part in the most pressing concerns of the environment.

The Philippine Center for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, Inc. (PCEPSDI) believed that the youth of today can be tool for environmental protection. Through their Green Youth Movement |(GYM), it cited that the Filipino youth should be involved in green initiatives because a) they comprises 30% of the country’s population, b) they are vulnerable to environmental degradation and disasters, c) they will inherit the responsibility of taking care of the environment, d) has high intellectual capacity for green initiatives, and e) has strong ability to mobilize.

This study had proven that CBSUA student leaders shared the same potentials. The documents from the Student Affairs and Services present an overwhelming proof for the University Student Organizations' initiatives towards environmental advocacy and protection. They became the implementing arm of OSAS in the promotion of environmental related initiatives which they themselves have conceptualized. No doubt, the youth of today through student organizations can be an important tool in the promotion of environmental education and protection.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Central Bicol State University of Agriculture supports student leadership through the student organizations. Student organizations in the university are empowered and given rights and privileges as stipulated in chapter VII of the student handbook. There were more than forty accredited student organizations in CBSUA. All of the accredited student organizations-initiated programs/projects and activities that are environment related as required by the university. A significant number of student organizations were noted to be actively involved, conducting at least three activities per year consisting of coastal clean-up, estero clean-up, tree planting, trainings and seminars on environmental awareness, clean and green program, pulot kalatsa Universidad, waste analysis and characterization study (WACS), recycling, Green CBSUA Campaign Photoshoot and others.

Student leaders, through the different student organizations are University's partners in the conduct of environment related initiatives. With adult supervision, student leaders' creativity and dynamism can effectively mobilize the students to sponsor and/or participate in environment related activities. This implies that they can be effective tools in promoting environmental education and protection. Student leadership through student organizations may be an effective tool in promoting environmental education and protection. Student empowerment can promote student involvement in the most pressing concerns of environment protection.

To enhance the effective student participation in environmental education and protection, the University may provide additional Student Development Fund (SDF) to solve fiscal constraints encountered by student organizations; organization advisers should be given lesser load for them to have more time in guiding student leaders in conceptualizing more effective and relevant environment related initiatives, and student leaders be given benefits in the form of scholarship, easy access to information in the library and opportunity to participate in capability building activities to further equip them with time and skills in the exercise of their power and responsibilities as student leaders.

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## **Table 2: Student Organizations Actively Involved in Environmental Advocacy and Protection**

| Name of Organization          | Environment Related Activities Conducted               | Date of Activity/ Venue      | Level                     |          |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| League of Ecologists          | University Clean-up                                    | August 31, 2015/ CBSUA       | Local                     |          |
|                               | LOE Cares  | Oct. 10, 2015/CBSUA          | Local                     |          |
|                               | Dept. Clean-up   | Aug. 15, 2015/CBSUA          | Local                     |          |
|                               | Green for Grin   | Oct. 3, 2015/ CBSUA          | Local                     |          |
|                               | Tree Planting  | June 23, 2015/ MINP          | Local                     |          |
|                               | Estero Clean Up  | Aug 23, 2015/ MINP           | Local                     |          |
|                               | Coastal Clean-Up                                       | Feb. 25, 2016/ MINP          | Local                     |          |
|                               | Waste Analysis and                                     | Aug. 16, 2015/               |                           |          |
|                               | Characterization Study (WACS)                          | Camp Martillana              | Regional                  |          |
|                               | Environmental Advocacy Seminar                         | Sept. 27, 2015/Pasacao C.S   |                           |          |
| League of Elementary Teachers | Waste Management Training-Seminar                      | April 7, 2015/ Gainza C.S.   | Regional                  |          |
|                               |  | Oct. 7, 2015/Cbariwan Ocampo | District                  |          |
|                               |  | Nov. 2015/GK Pili            | District                  |          |
|                               | Clean and Green Program                                | July 15- March 2016          | Local                     |          |
|                               | PulotKalatsa Universidad                               | September 2015/ CBSUA        | Local                     |          |
| Rotaract Club of Isarog       | ASOS Clean-up Drive                                    | November 2015/ CBSUA         | Local                     |          |
|                               | Grin for Green   | Nov. 19, 2015/ LGU Pili      | Local                     |          |
|                               | Let's Do It Philippines                                | Nov. 20, 2015/ MINP          | District                  |          |
|                               | Tree Planting and Distribution of Planting Materials   | Sept 20, 2015/ MINP          | Regional                  |          |
|                               | Coastal Clean-up                                       | Sept. 2015 Calabanga         | District                  |          |
|                               | Training on Community Waste Management                 | October 2015/ LGU Pili       | District                  |          |
|                               | Training on Community Information guide                | October 2015/LGU Pili        | District                  |          |
|                               | Physical and Biological Sciences Student Union (PBSSU) | PulotKalat                   | Sept. 11, 2015/ Naga City | District |
|                               |  | Let's Do It Philippines      | Nov. 21, 2015/ CBSUA      | Regional |
|                               |  | Boothill Clean up Drive      | Dec. 12, 2015/CBSUA       | Local    |
| Road to Paris Climate Summit  |  | Aug. 29, 2015/ CBSUA         | Local                     |          |
| Sarong Banggi Organization    | Road to Paris Climate Summit                           | Aug. 2015/ CBSUA             | Local                     |          |

|                         |                        |                      |          |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| International           | Grin for Green         | Nov. 2015/ CBSUA     | Local    |
| Let's Do It Philippines | Nov. 21, 2015          | Seminar on Container | Regional |
|                         | Gardening              | October 2015/ CBSUA  | Local    |
| Spirited Otakus'        |                        |                      |          |
| Ultimate League         | Road to Paris, Climate |                      |          |
| (SOUL)                  | Summit                 | August 2015          | Regional |
|                         | Green CBSUA Campaign   |                      |          |
|                         | Photoshoot             | August 2015/CBSUA    | Local    |
|                         | Grin for Green         | Nov. 2015/ CBSUA     | Local    |