



Feeling the heat: Dulangan Higaonon youth embark on reforestation program

“They have realized that climate change has become alarming. Even if we’re living in the mountains, we can feel that it’s really getting hotter,” Karen Pusan, leader of the Nangaon Higaonon Youth Organization, explained why her fellow Higaonon youth were enthusiastic about the collection of wildlings.

On July 13-15 this year, young people belonging to the Dulangan Unified Ancestral Domain of the Higaonon tribe in Misamis Oriental initiated a collection of wildlings of endemic tree species such as lauan, dao, naga, and tugas. The wildlings will be planted in the denuded areas of their territory, a large part of which was deforested by mining operations in the past decades.

Including the women and members of the barangay council of Nangaon in Opol town, the collectors numbered around 50 individuals.

“I could see their enthusiasm because this is what we really want to achieve, to restore the environment,” Karen said. The barangay councils are also being involved to come up with a unified effort toward conservation, she added.

She said they are doing *pahina* (voluntary work) such as watering to ensure the survival of the replanted wildlings.

The Higaonon youth groups started collecting wildlings in 2022. So far, they have gathered around 800 seedlings, and built a nursery where the young trees are placed in polyethylene bags prior to replanting mainly in tribal areas.

She said there are other denuded areas but these are private lands and prone to fire, aside from being far from the barangay proper.

But Karen admitted that some of the wildlings died either due to improper handling or because they were prematurely collected.

She said the wildlings collection activity is a way to unify and involve the youth in conservation.

Karen, a Cohort participating in the Women Environmental Defenders Program being supported by Samdhana Institute, said it is also one way of helping the elders strengthen the tribe.



“If the elders are mainly concerned with tribal laws and governance, we, the youth, focus on restoring the environment,”

Karen, also a *basbasonon*, or a young individual who is groomed to be a future leader of the tribe, emphasized.

She said their future plan is to put up a nursery in every *barangay* within the ancestral domain to encourage local residents to do the wildlings collection themselves.

The Dulangan ancestral domain covers eight *barangays* in Opol (Awang, Bagoceboc, Tingalan, Cauyunan, Nangaon, Limonda) and two others (Mahayahay and Upper Malubog) in Manticao town, also in Misamis Oriental.

