



Nabao Lake: Wetland Conservation and Community Development



Photo: Pat Labitoria

Nabao Lake is a 38-hectare oxbow lake in Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. Shaped like an inverted "C", it was once part of the Pampanga River until a flood control dike was built and separated this portion of the river.

"Nabao" - in local terms means the loss of one's partner or being alone according to the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Cabiao, a name apt for the Lake's history with Pampanga River.

Today, the lake cannot be called "alone" - its easements being site to about 80-120 houses ranging from shacks to permanent concrete structures. Consequently, it also home to fauna like the native Asian Swamp eel, and introduced freshwater fishes like tilapia, Imelda, catfish, mudfish and eel that the nearby community catch for food.

The local government of Cabiao is set to develop Nabao Lake for eco-tourism. Its bank being very accessible from the highway, the lakeshore becomes a good vantage point to see the lone Mt. Arayat rising above the plains of Pampanga while the water evokes calmness and respite from the heat. The proposed development will form part of a regional ecotourism loop which features natural and historical attractions such as Mt. Arayat, Minalungao National Park, Fort Magsaysay, and Mt. Mingan.

But apart from its tourism potential, Nabao Lake is also recognized for its disaster mitigating capabilities. As Cabiao sits inside a high flooding susceptibility zone¹, the water body plays an important role in reducing the frequency of inundations by storing significant volume of rain water such that its depth reaches to around 5.0 meters (from 1.80 to 3.80 meters) during rainy season as storm water, which comes most significantly from the national highway, drains to the lake.

Being largely agricultural (9,743 hectares is allocated for agriculture), Cabiao farmers nearby also depend on the lake during times of drought or dry spells for irrigation of farms planted with rice and other crops such as corn, vegetable and sorghum, as well as fruit-bearing trees like mangoes and citrus.

Such benefits pushed the LGU of Cabiao to partner with different National Government Agencies and the academe in developing a wetland management plan which aims to revitalize and conserve the lake through eco-tourism development.

Currently, the LGU is working towards the relocation of the informal settlers that have made the lakeshore their home to halt the uncontrolled dumping of solid and liquid wastes. Their formulated Rehabilitation and Development Plan includes a Lake Rehabilitation section which details activities like dredging, de-silting, construction of slope protection using gabions, implementation of green architecture principles and construction of water treatment facilities, nature village and a wetland information center to attain their vision of "A living and revitalized Nabao Lake ecosystem that is conserved and protected by the community."

If all goes according to plan, the initiative of the LGU of Cabiao for Nabao Lake will serve as a testament that wetland conservation and the recognition of its ecosystem services can be drivers towards community development that already anticipates and is preparing for the disastrous effects of climate change.

Mapping Wetland Priorities for Ecosystem - based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (EbA) in the Philippines



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Note: (1) 1:10,000 Flooding susceptibility map developed by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau. (see: <http://gdis.mgb.gov.ph/mgbgoogle/>)

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