



The Lelapoy Creek and Me

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I still remember my younger days in *Sezukadang*, in New Visayas, Don Carlos town, Bukidnon, when all of us would go to fetch water from the wells dug by the *Lelapoy* Creek that sort of filter the water for drinking, do our laundry, take a bath, and go fishing for a meal. At times I had to leave for school late because I had to fetch water for the family. I felt sorry for my parents, who, after doing "*hurnal*" (farm work) for a P150 daily wage, would still go down the creek to get water for all of us.

During school breaks, our elders as well as my childhood friends would gather by the creek, have conversations, and play to their heart's delight. Everything appeared to be in order, with our elders in a good working relationship with one another, and us happily enjoying Nature's gifts.

The creek also became my silent friend, whom I would talk to every time I got surprises, felt happy or confused as I approached my teenage years. But as we grew older and began going to school, *Lelapoy* seemed to have become distant, especially during rainy times.

Aside from *Lelapoy* Creek, I also treasure those moments witnessing our elders perform "*buron-buron*," or meetings, for updating and settling conflicts among families or clans. For their part, the young people used to have regular gatherings to talk about our cultural practices as *Kirenteken-Menuvu*. These, however, have stopped due to economic difficulties that forced some of them to leave our place for work. Others have even permanently moved.

In 2019, The Samdhana Institute arrived to facilitate the installation of our water system. Moreover, by accompanying us — the youth and women's organizations, and the Indigenous Peoples Structure — Samdhana has indeed helped a lot in terms of deepening our understanding of our rights as IPs, the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), and, most importantly, equipping us with the knowledge and skills to facilitate trainings and meetings.

Neumpong Ne Memenguhed te Sezukadang, our youth group in *Sezukadang*, has been replicated through the organizing of other youth groups inside CADTs 206 and 202. But I couldn't believe myself leading the CADT 206-wide youth group that we named the *Neumpong Ne Memenguhed te Ukimtrico*, which consists of 48 clans. (CADT stands for Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title.)

Being a woman leader, I have learned the value of patience, effective conflict resolution skills and humility by always remembering my roots despite receiving an educational grant from Samdhana. Besides, I know that in difficult times we will have the support of our elders who would address the problems using our customary ways of resolving disputes.

Entering college wasn't easy for me. I had to adjust to changes or new situations, including meeting people of different viewpoints, and being away from home, my younger siblings and parents. Nevertheless, my self-confidence has gradually grown, and I've been able to control my tendency to cry.

It's not so much the material assistance that people or Samdhana has given me, but rather my resolve and vision for our tribe to go through positive changes over time—the kind of change that does not jeopardize our future and the generations to come. This is what consistently gives me extraordinary strength.

Nonetheless, my heart bleeds for *Lelapoy* Creek, my refuge and ever loyal friend, every time I hear about the use of chemicals by the banana plantation that entered our place without undergoing the FPIC process. Chemical contamination will eventually lead to the death of the creek of my beautiful memories, and this will leave me feeling empty.

I and the other young people of my tribe must fight until the end to protect and conserve *Lelapoy*.

