

Written message for IDB 2026 from the Haribon Foundation

This International Day for Biological Diversity, we join the global call for “Acting locally for global impact” by recognizing the vital role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in protecting the ecosystems that sustain both people and wildlife.

In the Aklan River Watershed Forest Reserve (ARWFR) on Panay Island, local action is already creating meaningful change. Through the AGOS Project, the Haribon Foundation works alongside Indigenous Peoples, local communities, local governments, people’s organizations, researchers, and other stakeholders to strengthen watershed governance, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem resilience in one of the country’s important forest landscapes.

The ARWFR is more than a biodiversity hotspot — it is a forest watershed that sustains rivers, livelihoods, food security, culture, and biodiversity across Aklan. It serves as the main watershed for the province, and is home to threatened and endemic wildlife such as the Dulungan or Rufous-headed Hornbill, Visayan Spotted Deer, Panay Monitor Lizard, and Rafflesia species — a genus that includes some of the largest flowers in the world.

Protecting this area requires a synergy between science and heritage. As Hon. Arth Gregorio, Punong Barangay of Panipiason in Aklan, shared:

“Dapat eamang nga mas tan-awon naton ro pagpabaskog it kaaeaman ag kapasidad it atong mga miyembro kaysa sa pinansiyal nga bagay dahil raya hay nagabuhay. Ag ru kaaeam, mahambae nakon nga manggad nga indi maduea kato hasta hin-uno.”

(We also need to focus on building the knowledge and capacity of our members rather than on financial matters, because knowledge lasts. As I would say, knowledge is a treasure that cannot be taken away, no matter what happens.)

By sharing such “treasures” of local knowledge and science, Project AGOS ensures that conservation remains inclusive and sustainable.

With the help of local partners Hon. Arth Gregorio, the project has secured five partnership agreements supporting conservation efforts in the watershed. Community members have also participated in parabiologist training, helping strengthen community-based biodiversity monitoring, local ecological leadership, and long-term stewardship of the watershed.

These local efforts among the forests of Aklan contribute to broader global goals for biodiversity and climate resilience. When communities lead conservation work, their local actions create a permanent and inspirational impact for the entire world.

[Photos here](#)