DEVELOPING ASTRONOMY AWARENESS AND EDUCATION IN EASTERN VISAYAS, PHILIPPINES

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1. THE BALUD PROJECT

The BALUD (Building Alliances and Leaders for Understanding and Development) Project, is an international youth-led initiative working on the development of poor and neglected communities through partnerships and youth leadership.

The Balud Project is active on the islands of Samar and Leyte located in the Eastern Visayas region in the Philippines. Due to its location, the area is frequently battered by typhoons. As such, most of the people living in the region are considered to be of lower-income bracket relative to other parts of the Philippines.

2. BRINGING ASTRONOMY TO EASTERN VISAYAS

In March 26-28, 2011, we began the first step in bringing astronomy to Eastern Visayas through a series of seminars held at Leyte Normal University in Tacloban City, Leyte and Balud Elementary School in Basey, Samar. We conducted our second visit to Balud Elementary School from July 9-10, 2011. The children viewed the Moon and Saturn through a telescope for the first time.

3. EMPOWERING SCIENCE EDUCATORS

Due to the very few number of trained astronomers in the Philippines, empowering science educators is important for a more effective and sustainable astronomy development. We conducted astronomy seminars for educators in Basey, Samar to train them on the concepts they need to learn in order to teach astronomy effectively.

4. UTILIZING A GRASSROOTS APPROACH

Although the current trend nowadays is to utilize technology to disseminate astronomy, such methods may not be applicable to rural and marginalized areas in the Philippines.

In our project, we have taken a more grassroots approach as a first step in increasing astronomy awareness. Activities not requiring the use of computers or telescopes were seen as effective tools for communicating astronomy. This approach would also lower the barrier to entry for astronomy, which is viewed as too technical and expensive in rural areas.

5. FUTURE PLANS

We aim to further develop astronomy by providing telescopes to schoolchildren in Basey. This can serve as a model project for astronomy education in rural Philippines. We also aim to develop a regional node for astronomy education which would be more effective, practical, feasible and sustainable in the long run.