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ALCADEV lives up to its role as an alternative school

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There is certainly a big reason to celebrate when Alcadev (Alternative Learning Center for Agriculture and Livelihood Development) topped the regional (CARAGA) level of the National Literacy Award in the outstanding literacy program category and subsequently placed fifth in the national level last year. But both the students and teachers are taking this recent achievement in stride.

The outstanding literacy program award is given to non-government organizations or academic institutions involved in delivering the Department of Education's alternative learning system program which have developed and implemented literacy programs that have made a positive impact on learners and the



community.

The students and teachers said they are happy with the award but they pointed out that the school is just living up to its role as a link between the *lumad's* (indigenous people) aspiration for development and the preservation of their culture. According to them, it is the main role of any school to serve the community and it is a pity that today, many schools have failed to live up to this role.

Since its establishment in 2004, Alcadev has been providing youth from various *lumad* tribes an alternative learning system for secondary education focusing on sustainable agriculture. It was established through the determined effort of *lumad* people's organization, MAPASU (Persevering Struggle for the Next Generation) to provide education to younger generations. They believe that education is the key towards improving their

lives but it should be one that enriches their culture, not erases



it.

What distinguishes Alcadev from other schools that are offering alternative learning system is that it fulfills its primary function of being the expression of *lumad's* desire to preserve their culture amidst the encroachment of commercialization and defend their ancestral land against development aggressions like large-scale mining and logging.

It is worth noting that Alcadev does not follow the system of a regular formal education school. It has its own curriculum designed primarily to equip the students the skills and knowledge on sustainable agriculture towards food security. This is in line with the comprehensive economic program of MAPASU to attain self-sufficiency and overcome high rate of poverty and low level of human development among the indigenous



people communities.

Hence, Alcadev follows lumads' collective will of embracing change and ability to identify what kind of development they want and at the same time preserve whatever is left in their culture.

The teachers and students asserted that Alcadev's edge over mainstream schools that offer alternative learning system is that Alcadev is truly an alternative school because it is espousing values that are different from those of the establishment. The students are trained to take responsibility, rely on their abilities and become bearers of change which is completely different from the dominant system of education today where students have become detached from the social



realities.

Based on its report, from 2004 to 2015, Alcadev has trained a total of 1,044 *lumad* youth, 88.7% of whom (926) have now been engaged in various development works in different IP communities in the region. Some IP organizations in other regions are even asking the school to send some of its graduates to their areas to help them in their own development works.

Solidagro was able to talk with some students who shared their thoughts about the school's recent achievement and how Alcadev lives up to its distinction as an alternative



school.

Michelle: *Alcadev deserves the award because it is mainly focused on how to uplift the lives of the indigenous people while preserving our culture and way of life. It is distinct from the formal schools because its program is based on the needs of the community. Education here is not commercialized and students are not eagerly conscious of individual achievements. We are always reminded to put the interest of the community over our individual desires.*

Jeric: *In Alcadev, the students are empowered to serve the community. After graduation, we can go back to our community to serve. We can choose to become para-agriculturists, community organizers, community health workers or teachers. We are always encouraged to hone our skills and talents. We are given voice in decision-making. Our teachers give us opportunity to resolve conflicts among*



ourselves.

Jerome: *What is truly remarkable with Alcadev is that we can apply what we have learned when we return to our community. Our parents are happy to see us helping them develop our small family farms. We are also given responsibility to lead in the development of communal farms. I can proudly say that through Alcadev's program, our production has increased which augments our income and enables our parents to meet the needs of the family.*

Amalyn: *We can see how our community has changed since Alcadev started. If before most of the households could only eat rice once a day, now almost all of the households can eat three times a day. Where can you see a school whose curriculum is designed not just for the improvement of individual students but the community at large?*

Renzel: *Our parents have learned their lessons well. They have realized how important education is in attaining development that's why they set up Alcadev. They said that because our elders had not been educated, they had been deceived by scrupulous lowlanders. Many had exchanged their lands for a few cans of sardines. But now, the Manobo youth are armed with knowledge from our education; we know our rights and we are ready to defend them. Today, no one can deceive us anymore.*

Angelyn: *In Alcadev, we do not experience the discrimination that our parents had suffered from the non-lumads when they were studying in the schools in town. It has given us opportunity to develop our skills and talents without any fear. There is no unequal treatment here.*



Without a doubt, Alcadev is at the forefront of the lumad struggle for the defense of their ancestral land and culture. But it has paid the price for it: the school had been vilified publicly by the military in several occasions accusing it as a training ground of the New People's Army, the armed wing of the underground communist movement which is waging armed struggle against the government.

In October last year, intense military operations in the MAPASU communities disrupted the classes in Alcadev as the students, together with their families, evacuated to the barangay center several kilometers away to flee from the atrocities of the soldiers. A few days earlier, a MAPASU council member was shot to death by armed men believed to be members of a paramilitary group. A group of armed men had also attempted to burn an elementary school operated by TRIFPS (Tribal Filipino Program of Surigao del Sur) in the nearby village.

One month after the evacuation, at least 300 people belonging to various people's organizations marched from different provinces of Mindanao to Manila (known as Manilakbayan)* to bring to the broadest public attention the human rights situation in Mindanao. Among the participants were eight Alcadev students who brought with them the school's and community's call to end military's attacks on IP schools and communities.

* click links below to see articles on Manilakbayan:

<http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/11/21/manilakbayan-peasants-urban-poor-indigenous-peoples-from-mindanao-arrive-in-manila-to-call-for-social-justice/>

<http://bulatlat.com/main/2014/12/10/manilakbayan-|mindanao-activists-head-home-with-more-dasig-to-struggle>