



ONLINE ADVOCACIES FOR EDUCATION TOWARDS FOREST CONSERVATION IN FACEBOOK

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ABSTRACT – The Philippines is undergoing serious forest degradation, mostly in the form of land use conversion mainly due to the fast-growing impoverished population. With the steady decline of forests, the animals living there will also lose their homes and migrate to places that the general public live in, resulting to occurrence of different diseases like dengue, malaria, ebola, and others, and consequently death among humans. This paper aims to highlight the need for general awareness of people about forest through online forest advocacies in Facebook. Specifically, the paper focused on investigating three organizations with online advocacies on forest and wood conservation with high number of followers and likes. Of the hundreds in the Philippines, three organizations' platforms and programs were then analyzed. Additionally, the influence of the organizations on their supporters was assessed. The preliminary screening identified: Forest Foundation Philippines, the Haribon Foundation, and Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC). Results showed that the Forest Foundation Philippines has three major grant categories and eight grant programs. The Haribon Foundation has three programs. While ESSC has six programs. The three organizations' online platforms have people that follow and like their pages. By doing this, they are expressing their want to support the page and that they want to see more content from it. Forest Foundation Philippines earning the highest number of likes, 60,815 followed by Haribon Foundation with 39,541, and ESSC with 5,612. The more information an advocacy page presents, the more followers or volunteers they have, can greatly show their positive impacts to the society. These online platforms help the masses gain quick knowledge as to how to take care of the forest resources even without going to the physical classrooms.

Keywords: advocacy, conservation, education, forest degradation, reforestation

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is one of the most severely deforested countries, having been listed as a biodiversity hotspot, which means that the Philippines is an area filled with endemic species but with high habitat loss (Myers, 1988). Of the 70% or 21 million hectares of forest cover in 1990 the forests cover dropped to 6.5 million hectares, as illegal logging continues to threaten the remaining forests (Butler, 2014). Because of this 50% of the topsoil has been lost and 70% of all croplands are susceptible to soil erosion (Walpole, 2016).

Deforestation has severe but subtle impacts on human health, such as increasing appearance of

tropical diseases; and outbreaks of new diseases, including fevers like Ebola and the Lassa fever. As the natural habitat or primary hosts of these pathogens continually decrease, through deforestation and forest disturbance, these pathogens seek out habitats and hosts hence, epidemics happen in human communities. Incidentally, these pathogens can cause a pandemic that could wipe out the human race. In fact, this is happening right now in the context of SARS-CoV-2, otherwise known as COVID-19 disease, is a pandemic (Diamandis, 2022).

Indeed, there is a need for massive literacy and education program on forest ecosystem conservation. Fortunately, the internet evolution is a promising medium for this endeavor. Currently, a lot of literacy and advocacy initiatives in forest reforestation and conservation are strategically done using the media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. And because of this, a great number of people will have ready access to relevant literacy programs and advocacies using the universally available mobile (Özdemir, 2012; Hefler, et. al., 2013; and Hawn, 2009).

This paper aims to highlight organizations with available online advocacies about forest conservation advocacies which are very much needed by the general public. Specifically, the paper sought to do the following: 1) identify the online organization and its advocacies, 2) enumerate the organizations' programs or projects, and 3) determine the organizations' impact on the followers.

METHODOLOGY

An initial survey of organizations with online advocacies on forest and wood utilization and sustainable conservation was done by searching keywords such as forest conservation, wood utilization, sustaining forest, etc. After having the long list of organizations, three were chosen based on the number of followers, likes, and platform.

According to Teles & Schmitt (2011), to evaluate advocacies, instead of focusing on their acts of advocacy, it is better to focus on evaluating advocates. Hence, in this paper, the comments and narratives of advocates and followers were also taken into account.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Organization Profile and Online Advocacies

Upon searching the vast internet resources, there are myriads of organizations having online advocacies on forest conservation. However, based on the number of followers, likes, and platform, the top three organizations are the Forest Foundation Philippines (FFP), Haribon Foundation and the Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC).

Table 1 indicates that among the three, the Forest Foundation Philippines garnered the most followers (66,864) and likes (63,288). The Haribon Foundation came second with 48,289 followers and 39,324 likes. While the ESSC has 5,614 likes and followers.

The data were gathered from their respective Facebook pages as of December 2021. Facebook or Meta is not simply just a social media site; indeed, it is the largest online social network, with 2.9 billion monthly active users (Walsh S., 2022). One of the advantages of Facebook is that users can post long messages on their boards unlike other social media, like Twitter, where there is a character limit. When users like posts on Facebook, this gives Facebook data which would then control the users' feed so that posts, such as the one that users liked, will be seen more often by those users (Facebook Help Center, n.d.).

Table 1. Information of the three organizations regarding the goals, the number of likes and the number of followers.

Organization	Goal	Number of followers	Number of likes
Forest Foundation Philippines	To provide assistance to projects that aim to conserve and protect Philippines forests and support the communities that are dependent to the forests.	66,864	63,288
Haribon Foundation	Restore the Philippine rainforests by the year 2020 using native tree species such as: Narra, Apitong, Lauan, etc. With an average survival rate of 80%.	48,289	39,324
Environmental Science for Social Change	The advocacy strongly believes that involving the communities is the most effective way to achieve environmental stability.	5,614	5,614

A variety of social media engagement in Facebook includes, likes, saves, clicks, comments, replies, follow, and others (Eckstein, M., 2021), making it very convenient and satisfying to all online users.

Therefore, these organizations with thousands of likes and followers such as the FFP, Haribon and the ESSC have thousands of possible engagements as well in FB. These engagements provide information on how well their audience is responding to the material they produce (Eckstein, M., 2021), that is, forest conservation for our chosen organizations. With the help of social media, particularly the FB, these organizations can reach their goals in a short period of time. In the study of Özdemiř, (2012), Greenpeace Mediterranean has been cited as a successful online campaign. Utilizing social media may improve contact with advocates (Guo & Saxton, 2013). And besides mere contact with advocates, the opportunity for involvement is provided by the social media. This is well noted by Fine (2006) in illustrating that for social change to be effective, supporters must be actively involved. Through social media, supporters may become aware of an issue. Nevertheless, organizers must work to turn this awareness into activities that further the cause. This is what the three chosen organizations (FFP, Haribon and ESSC) are doing in their online advocacies. In fact they engage with the public using different types and levels of engagements labeled as ladder of engagement by Kanter and Paine (2012).

The top three organizations with online advocacies, although all about forest conservation, have different priorities and goals. The Forest Foundation Philippines' goal is to protect and conserve the Philippine forests by supporting responsible forest management guided by science-based knowledge, empowering forest-dependent communities to protect the forests while making a living in a sustainable manner, and finally, by supporting projects that advocate for forest conservation and protection (<https://www.facebook.com/forestfoundationph>). FFP is in agreement with Newton (2008) who asserts that conservation can be accomplished through raising the value of wild resources to local communities which can be addressed by online advocacies and engagements.

On the other hand, the Haribon Foundation advocates for sustainable solutions to protect nature and preserve life (<https://www.facebook.com/GoHaribon>). They carry out their goal by establishing

community-led native tree nurseries and strengthening marine protected areas using science and community-driven values. The Haribon Foundation's goal is to plant native trees in the communities to enhance reforestation.

Finally, the third organization is the Environmental Science for Social Change (<https://www.facebook.com/esscphilippines>). Its goal is to sustain the environment, cultural, and economic way of life by understanding the interrelation of actions on the environment while considering the history of the basis of living with the land. The FB of the organization exposed their participants to new ideas, concepts, and methods, and will hopefully inspire people to care for their environment in a more efficient way. They promote knowledge explaining that it is not just about planting, but that it is also about knowing how and where exactly to plant these trees. The state of Philippine mangroves has been a subject in one of their webinars. The case of mangroves has always been a disappointing truth. People had been led to plant the wrong species in a zone not appropriate for such (Buot 2020; Primavera 2000). Hence, there is gross mortality and the reforestation efforts had become a waste. Online education and advocacy regarding this concern is relevant. Almost everybody has cellphone and has FB account and hence, can access only if online advocacies flood the FB or whatever online platform. ESSC has started this and hopefully many more will come across with their FB page.

Programs and Partners of the Top Three Organizations

As seen in Table 2, all the three chosen organizations have different programs and projects but with similar partners such as forest related companies, academic institutions, student organizations, local government units and government agencies of similar interests. It is clear that these organizations' projects are geared towards forest conservation. And all three put premium on partnership. Indeed, partnership to achieve goals (SDG 17) is necessary to enhance advocacy (Lund, et. al. (2021).

Forest Foundation Philippines. The Forest Foundation Philippines (FFP) has three grant and three special grant programs (Table 2). The three grant programs are, Forest Landscape Grant Program, Focused Grant Program, Dr. Perry S. Ong Fellowship Program. The special grants are, Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Area Landscape (MMPL) Endowment Fund, Philippines Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes (SIBOL) Project, and Sustainable and Inclusive Landscape Governance (SILG).

The FFP supports any project that aims to conserve, protect, and teach and promote sustainable management of forests inside and outside the FFP'S focal landscapes. Many of their partners are universities and organizations with interest in forestry and forest conservation. FFP has assisted many students in their theses and dissertation researches. These programs and projects highlighted in FFP's FB page are lifelong and encompassing and had been carefully planned in recognition of the role of forests as lifeblood of the rural and urban communities in the vicinities.

It is indeed beneficial that a number of online advocacy programs are included in the FB page of FFP along with other organizations. People can learn more about what they do than just plainly supporting their objectives. Online platforms can also be used for learning purposes. The study of Nikhoma, (2015), revealed how much students use online social network. The students claim that they make use of it for online communication and that it significantly improves their perception of the value of the information in student-instructor interactions, notably on Facebook. Therefore, the followers of these organizations can learn a lot from the online platforms they have.

Haribon Foundation. The FB page of Haribon Foundation has a lot to offer to its followers and

Table 2. The programs and partners of the three online advocacies.

Organization	Program	Partners
Forest Foundation Philippines	Forest Landscape Grant Program	Companies
	Focused Grant Program	Student organizations
	Dr. Perry S. Ong Fellowship Program	Universities and students
	Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Area Landscape (MMPL) Endowment Fund	
	Philippines Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes (SIBOL) Project	
	Sustainable and Inclusive Landscape Governance (SILG)	
Haribon Foundation	Rainforestation Organizations and Advocates (ROAD)	
	Adopt-a-Seedling	LGU
	Nurture-a-Tree	Academic institutions
	Tree planting	Government agencies
	Gift Tree	
Environmental Science for Social Change	Advancing Youth Development in Mindanao (AYDIM)	LGU
	Assessment of Land and Resources Management (ALARM)	Academic institutions
	Generating Advancement for Upland Peoples (GAUP)	Government agencies
	Building Back Better	
	Eco-Agriculture	
	Isabela Land Cover Assessment (ILCA)	
	Land Use Change Impacts and Drivers (LUCID)	

viewers just like the FFP. ROAD (Rainforestation Organizations and Advocates), a banner project, offers a variety of programs from which a "client" might choose, including Adopt-a-Seedling, Nurture-a-Tree, Join a tree planting, and Give a Gift Tree. Adopt-a-Seedling is about adopting a seedling of a Philippine native tree species like narra, dao, kamacong, makaasim, and lauan for a minimal donation of three hundred fifty pesos (PHP 350.00) and the Haribon will be the ones who will take care of the adopted tree for 3 years. The Haribon Foundation has a nursery of native trees at Caliraya-Lumot Watershed in Lumban, Laguna for this purpose. They also have a classroom called Bahay Pulaan where they produce native tree seedlings for activities such as tree planting. The Haribon Foundation uses native trees because they are the ones acquainted with our local conditions and ecology. These trees are the ones known to our native fauna and other organisms found in the forest (Murray, H., 2016). Forests with a diverse mix of native trees increases the long-term resilience of forest ecosystems amidst climate change anomalies and other environmental disasters (Thompson, 2009).

Environmental Science for Social Change. The ESSC has six dynamic programs: Advancing Youth Development in Mindanao (AYDIM), Assessment of Land and Resources Management and Generating Advancement for Upland Peoples (ALARM-GAUP), Building Back Better, Eco-Agriculture, Isabela Land Cover Assessment (ILCA), and Land Use Change Impacts and Drivers (LUCID). The programs involve the always excluded but most energetic sector with very high potential, the youth, in promoting environmental sustainability and social justice. The ESSC also value the knowledge of the locals. They involve the local people in their programs. This is based on the fact that local forest users have unique knowledge that is vital to the conservation of local forests as reported in many studies (Jackson, N., 2007, Engels et al, 2011; Caringal et al., 2020).

Impact of the organization to the followers

The impact of the chosen organizations to their followers and viewers had been studied Comments and conversations were looked into and categorized into three themes: 1) engaging narratives, 2) appreciative gesture, and 3) desire to learn more (Table 3). The engaging narrative contains the followers' queries, tagging of friends, and interests. The appreciative gesture includes, well wishes to the organization and gratitude for all they have learned, while the category "desire to learn more" indicates interest in joining the groups' followers.

Table 3. Comments of followers towards the content of the organizations' postings.

Category	Comments
Engaging Narratives	(FFP) <i>“Good but quite difficult to look for planting materials. I strive to plant despite the challenges...”</i> Larry Sevilla
	<i>“Interesting info Erwel Jhun Recta”</i> Joe De Jesus (who even tagged a friend)
	(FFP) <i>“tagged you Nenita Sy as this is in line with your latest hobby.”</i> Edmund Leo Rico

Table 3 (Continued). Comments of followers towards the content of the organizations' postings.

Category	Comments
	(Haribon Foundation)
	"good morning team Haribon!" Kath Leen Demetrio Zambas
	(Haribon Foundation)
	Christelle Reganion <i>tagging her friends Ian Reganion and Juan Reganion</i>
	(ESSC)
	"will the breakout groups be livestreamed?" Moni Mirasol Mariano
	(ESSC)
	"We are going" Eufemia Lagasca De Guzman
	(ESSC)
	"Pls include me" Vicente Domingo
Appreciative Gesture	(FFP)
	<i>"Thank you very much sa FOREST FOUNDATION PHILIPPINES. Maliban sa XAESFi, sila ang unang nag tiwala at nagbigay financial at technical support sa KGMC at later sa COMFAS din sa proyekto namin sa MANGROVES project sa Kabasalan at sa buong Zamboanga Sibugay. Nagbigay sila ng mga pundo para sa aming mga capacity building at livelihood projects. Sila talaga ang unang National partners namin sa mangroves bago pa ang DENR. Salamat FFP kay Sir Atty. Andres Canibel (Executive Directors) kay Sir Erik Buduan, Mam Marjory Pamplona at sa buong officers and staff of FFP thank you very much again and again. God bless you always."</i>
	Robert Ballon
	(FFP)
	<i>"Thank you so much Forest Foundation Philippines for supporting this study through the IIRR-led Leyte Sab-a Basin Peatland Restoration Initiative (Jan 2018 - Jan 2022)."</i>
	Jerome L. Montemayor
	(FFP)
	<i>"Thank you very much sa FOREST FOUNDATION PHILIPPINES. Maliban sa XAESFi, sila ang unang nag tiwala at nagbigay financial at technical support sa KGMC at later sa COMFAS din sa proyekto namin sa MANGROVES project sa Kabasalan at sa buong Zamboanga Sibugay. Nagbigay sila ng mga pundo para sa aming mga capacity building at livelihood projects. Sila talaga ang unang National partners namin sa mangroves bago pa ang DENR. Salamat FFP kay Sir Atty. Andres Canibel (Executive Directors), kay Sir Erik Buduan, Mam Marjory Pamplona at sa buong officers and staff of FFP, thank you very much again and again. God Bless you always"</i>
	Robert Ballon (FFP)

Table 3 (Continued). Comments of followers towards the content of the organizations’ postings.

Category	Comments
	(Haribon Foundation) <i>“Thankful to Haribon.. I was able to work with Bantay Gubat in Antique for 8 months”</i> Sophia Lee
	(Haribon Foundation) <i>“Well done, Haribon team!”</i> Kitty A. Gamboa
	(ESSC) <i>“I’ve been using bokashi method for 3 years now for veg and fruit peels. Last year, I started composting cooked and raw food wastes also using bokashi method. It feels good to be able to divert these wastes from the landfill and to be compassionate with garbage collectors”</i> Cora Partosa
Desire to learn more	(FFP) <i>“Forest Foundation Philippines in south Cotabato, do you have accredited member po. Kidapawan is quite far po. Thanks”</i> Larry Sevilla
	(Haribon Foundation) <i>“May I ask if Haribon has any info of any barangay or any LGU that has an ordinance on wildlife conservation? How can I get a copy of such ordinance? What specific acts are prohibited to prevent destruction of wildlife or preserve wildlife habitat?”</i> Grace Galace
	(Haribon Foundation) <i>“Hello! We can still adopt a seedling, correct?”</i> Alexandra Marie
	(ESSC) <i>Philippines too bad I missed this live, what is YouTube Channel where the 3 day conference will be uploaded so I can watch it there instead?”</i> Grace Roska Shimomura

Although likes and follows are important to boost engagement in Facebook, most people only like a page because someone they know, liked it. Though this is not always the case, the implication is that a page's high like and follower count does not necessarily indicate that the brand is doing well. But it surely indicates popularity. According to Ken (2014), even if a page has a high number of likes, many advocacy pages receive very little interaction from their fans and followers, and their material is largely disregarded. This is contrary to what is happening with the FB pages of FFP, Haribon and ESSC. Their pages not only have high number of likes and followers, but they have high engagements with followers and viewers as well. Basing on the likes and follows alone won't be enough to gauge the significance and relevance of the content of a page. But these could be start of a deeper online relationship which could be engaging and meaningful. The comments and conversations are of paramount importance. They show that the followers are connecting to the posts and advocacy of the organization. In the case of this study, the followers are serious about forest conservation. Comments are a form of customer testimonial proof from a happy consumer. People are therefore more likely to connect with the advocacy website and its objective as a result of this (Holtman, 2019). Hence, these are accounted for in this study. FFP, Haribon and ESSC have these special engagements from the public making their FB pages not only popular because of their high likes and follows, but relevant as well because of the comments, narratives, and appreciation posts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Social media, particularly, Facebook (FB), become increasingly relevant in terms of promoting forest rehabilitation and restoration advocacies. From the many online advocacy groups reviewed, three were chosen, the Forest Foundation Philippines, Haribon Foundation, and the Environmental Science for Social Change. Choosing these three, were based on the number of likes and follows and their respective nature of content and platforms. Programs, projects, and partners were identified and comments and engagements from the followers and the greater public, were examined and categorized into themes: engaging narrative, appreciative gesture and desire to learn more. Though many believe that high number of likes and follows do not necessarily reflect page's content, but such likes and follows could be the start of a meaningful engagement with the content of the page. FFP, Haribon, and ESSC all have high number of likes and follows. The online content on forest rehabilitation and restoration is popular. And the content is also very relevant, evidenced by the engaging conversations with their followers. This can hopefully be translated into forest rehabilitation and restoration, the very goal of these organizations. Indeed, the use of FB in their advocacy has proven a success.

It is hypothesized that the people who had been engaging in the comments and conversations are people who had been contemplating on these advocacies for some time already in the past but were devoid of a single opportunity. And they can readily join just now, because of the online platform, made available by these three organizations. Online advocacies essentially, an education and awareness campaign, seeks to engage with the readers to promote social transformation which is into forest biodiversity, particularly on forest conservation. During the pandemic the online advocacies did not stop. There were even more with the addition of webinars FB live or zoom or other online platforms. It is recommended that every cause should go in order to reach a larger audience. Further research should review the efficacy of the online advocacies into actual on the ground transformation.

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