

## **The potential of the University of San Carlos Talamban Campus, Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines as a botanic garden: challenges and opportunities**

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The University of San Carlos (USC) in Cebu City is one of the top universities of the Philippines and boasts not only academic pursuits, but also a wealth of biodiversity and natural beauty in its Talamban Campus, which holds untapped potential to flourish as a botanic garden. It is home to more than a hundred species of native plants and various fauna including the island endemic Cebu Black Shama. As a botanic garden with an existing biological museum and herbarium, the campus can serve as a platform for raising awareness about conservation challenges and showcasing efforts to protect threatened and endangered species. This is especially vital for a metropolitan area which has one of the largest protected landscapes in the region but still continually experiences forest fragmentation and decline. Previous efforts to enhance the utilization of the green spaces within the campus, such the beekeeping program, butterfly sanctuary, and arboretum for native tree species, have had unfortunate results because of the lack of personnel, inaccessibility to the area due to COVID-19 lockdowns, and damage brought by Super Typhoon Rai (Odette). Currently, small steps are being taken towards this transformation into a botanic garden, such as partnerships from the Beyond Borders initiative of the cities of Cebu and Mandaue, and various locally-funded future projects. One major challenge for the fruition of this endeavour is convincing the various stakeholders and administrators of the university of its feasibility and viability. Moreover, adequate funding, dedicated personnel and sustainable management practices will be crucial in sustaining the garden's growth and impact. Through this botanic garden initiative, USC can not only enhance its educational offerings but also promote conservation and sustainability initiatives, thereby cultivating a green legacy that enriches the lives of those who walk through its future botanical wonderland.