Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative

COURSE REPORT

A Technical and Policy Forum on Mainstreaming Native Species for Restoration and Production

Quezon City, Philippines November 8, 2016

An event organized by:

Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI)
Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI)
Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)

Background: The Philippines is slowly undergoing a transformation in the way that it conducts reforestation. Conventionally, reforestation efforts plant mostly fast-growing exotic tree species, like Swietenia macrophylla, Gmelina arborea, and Acacia mangium. The usage of these species have in some cases succeeded in reestablishing tree cover, but they do not deliver the same level of ecosystem services, such as biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, water purification, pollination, and soil erosion control, as mixed stands of native species do. Moreover, they do not provide the range of timber and non-timber forest products that are valued by local communities. As a result, the conventional reforestation programs have not had a significant influence both in recovering good quality forests and in reducing the pressure on the already threatened remaining forests.

The Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI), together with other civil society organizations, has been advocating for the shift from conventional reforestation to Rainforestation, a locally developed form of native species reforestation. A number of successes have been achieved, including the passing of national policies that support Rainforestation, the adoption of the approach in the National Greening Program, the development of a cadre of certified trainers, and the establishment of several Rainforestation sites all over the country. Despite the accomplishments, reforestation using exotic species still prevails.



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To investigate the reasons for this resistance to the paradigm shift, ELTI, RFRI and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) organized this technical and policy forum to assess the current state of native species reforestation in the Philippines and to explore avenues to further facilitate the transition. This forum was held at the Biodiversity Management Bureau Training Center at the Ninoy Aquino Parks & Wildlife Compound in Diliman, Quezon City.

Objectives: The technical and policy forum had the following objectives:

- 1. to highlight the importance of native species in restoring ecosystem services that support both local communities and biodiversity, and in recapturing international markets for premium timber species and other forest-based products, while meeting the local needs.
- 2. to have a dialogue with the DENR and other relevant bureaus on the current technical capacity and existing policies and programs on native species propagation and production.
- 3. to examine the constraints and gaps in research, development and implementation, brainstorm ways to address these issues, and plan the steps moving forward.

Course Format: The forum was opened by Dr. David Neidel (ELTI) and Dr. Antonio Manila (DENR). The Keynote Address was presented by Mr. Marlo Mendoza, the Officer-in-Charge Undersecretary for Policy and Planning, who discussed the current focus of the DENR in the use of native species within the National Greening Program. According to Mr. Mendoza, there are plenty of DENR policies that call for the use of native tree species, so the focus should be more on governance and management issues of implementing them on the ground.

Prof. Mark Ashton (Yale University) then gave a lecture on the dynamics of deforestation and reforestation, including a detailed account of why best to plant native species. Prof. Edwino Fernando (University of the Philippines-Los Baños) discussed ecosystem services of forests and the multilateral agreements that necessitate the focus on the use of native species for biodiversity conservation, environmental sustainability, climate resiliency, and human development. This was followed by Dr. Marlito Bande (Visayas State University), who presented the ecological and socio-economic benefits of Rainforestation from their 20 years of field experience. Finally, Dr. Antonio Daño (Ecosystems Research & Development Bureau) provided an overview of his agency's research efforts into identifying native species that are most appropriate for growing in different biophysical conditions and for achieving a variety of environmental and economic goals.

Ms. Ester Batangan, together with other RFRI members, namely Ms. Lyra Chu (RFRI), Ms. Katherine Galido (Non-timber Forest Products-Exchange Programme or NTFP-EP), Mr. Dazzle Labapis (NTFP-EP), Mr. Eric Buduan (Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation), and Ms. Hazel Consunji (ELTI), facilitated the afternoon workshop. The participants were divided into three groups: Research and Development, Policy, and Markets. Focusing on their assigned aspect, the groups identified the accomplishments, the challenges, the gaps, and immediate actions that need to be done in order to address the constraints and chasms surrounding native species propagation and reforestation. The groups outlined their discussion results and presented them to the larger group. Discussions on these issues followed.

The forum was closed by Dr. Perry Ong (University of the Philippines-Diliman or UPD), who discussed parallels between this forum and the Mainstreaming Native Species-based Forest Restoration Conference that was held in UPD in 2010. He raised the question of whether we have made adequate progress in our advocacy over the last 6 years and suggested we need to critically examine our focus in order to come up more effective strategies. He also recommended a new DENR policy which clearly delineates a transition from the current reforestation and production situation to the exclusive use of native species in the near future.

Participants: The forum was attended by 65 participants from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, state universities and colleges, and the private sector.

Follow Up: The key messages from this forum will be published and disseminated through the RFRI network to interested stakeholders who were not able to join the event. The proceedings will also be made available for download from the ELTI and RFRI websites. Meanwhile, the output of the workshop will serve as valuable input for deliberations within RFRI on strategic directions for the advocacy and capacity building efforts of the network, as well as basis for recommendations to DENR and other concerned agencies and institutions.



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