

COURSE REPORT

Mindanao Rainforest Restoration Forum

Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines
December 7 - 8, 2010

A Forum jointly organized by:

The Department of Environment & Natural Resources (DENR) and the Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI)

Forum Sponsors:

ELTI, DENR, Bukidnon State University, Municipal Government of Impasugong, Municipal Government of Malaybalay, Shell Corporation (via the Philippine Eagle Foundation), Provincial Government of Bukidnon, Visayas State University



Background: The issue of climate change has caught the attention not only of the global scientific community, but also Local Government Units (LGU), private institutions, and civil society organizations, all of which are increasingly working together to find effective ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change. One common response is the development of tree planting programs on denuded mountains and other environmentally critical areas. The planting of trees serves to reduce the risks from disasters brought

about by erratic weather patterns (e.g. flooding and landslides) and increase the delivery of other ecosystem services, while mitigating climate change through the sequestration of carbon dioxide in the biomass of the trees. Most of these efforts in the Philippines, however, use fast growing exotic species, like mahogany, *Acacia*, and *Gmelina*, which are of less value in terms of biodiversity conservation and other ecosystem services.

Over the last three years, ELTI has been working with partners from the Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI), a network of academic and civil society organizations, to shift the tree-planting paradigm to one which prioritizes the use of native species for forest restoration and other land management goals—an approach known in the Philippines as “Rainforestation”. To date, ELTI has held in conjunction with Visayas State University (VSU) three Rainforestation Trainer’s Trainings to disseminate the knowledge and skills needed to propagate and successfully grow native tree species. In July 2010, ELTI also held a “Mainstreaming Native Species-Based Forest Restoration” Conference, which was attended by close to 300 participants, to further disseminate information about native species reforestation approaches. The trainings and conference have generated a lot of interest from LGUs and others to initiate native species tree planting programs in the Philippines.



The province of Bukidnon is one such example. Through the initiative of Provincial Governor Hon. Alex P. Calingasan and Mr. Felix Mirasol, DENR Protected Area Superintendent of Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park and Rainforestation Trainer, the province recently launched its “Bukidnon Greening Program.” The program aims to work with civic, government and private institutions to restore 50% of Bukidnon’s forest cover. The official launch of the program in August 2010 resulted in the planting of 10,000 native seedlings with participation from almost 500 individuals representing 16 government and private offices.

Bukidnon is a very important province on Mindanao, the large southern island of the Philippines. It is home to Mt. Kitanglad, a Key Biodiversity Area and ASEAN Heritage Park, which also protects the headwaters of 7 major rivers that provide water for domestic use, power generation and irrigation to the surrounding regions. Blessed with fertile soils and sheltered from typhoons, the province is known as the “food basket” of the country supplying valuable agricultural crops both for domestic and export markets. However, it is for this very reason that the province has lost much valuable forest cover to large-scale industrial plantations causing massive soil erosion and water pollution. The reforestation efforts being undertaken in Bukidnon, therefore, not only have island-wide significance, but national implications as well. The 2-day Mindanao Rainforest Restoration Forum, thus, was developed to further cultivate initial gains in the Bukidnon Greening Program, as well as to showcase the program for replication in other regions of Mindanao. The forum aimed to further disseminate the importance of using native species in all forest restoration efforts.

Course Objectives:

The objectives for the training were as follows:

- To provide participants with the scientific basis for native species reforestation (i.e., Rainforestation) and to discuss local experiences in implementing this approach;
- To engage and develop partnerships with the Mindanao protected area managers, environment and pollution control officers of private corporations, local policy makers, tribal community organizations, local water districts, academe, and local government units in native species reforestation initiatives; and,
- To identify, discuss, and prioritize activities, such as capacity building, public awareness and advocacy, policy integration, research, resource mobilization and implementation of Rainforestation on the ground.

Course Format: The forum took place over a two-day period at Bukidnon State University in Malaybalay City. During the first day, participants were introduced to the Bukidnon Greening Program and listened to a series of presentations on the social and ecological aspects of forest restoration and locally relevant climate change research. During the second day, participants were divided into regional and functional groups in order to discuss the possibilities for forest restoration in the different administrative regions of Mindanao and develop action plans. A visit to one of the recent Rainforestation sites in Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park was planned for the afternoon, but due to unfavorable weather conditions, the group visited a nearby recreational park instead in order to see one of the early government-initiated native species reforestation sites.



Coordinators and Resource People: The event was organized by Mr. Felix Mirasol with significant input from Ms. Alicia Calle, ELTI Leadership Program Coordinator, Ms. Hazel Consunji, ELTI-Asia Training Program Assistant, and Dr. David Neidel, ELTI-Asia Training Program Coordinator. Welcome remarks were provided by Hon. Alex P. Calingasan (Governor of Bukidnon), Maximo O. Dichoso (DENR Regional Executive Director for Region 10), Dr. David Neidel (ELTI), and Dr. Victor M. Barroso (President, Bukidnon State University). The keynote address was given by Dr. Nereus Acosta (Former Congressman from Bukidnon and incoming DENR Secretary). Presentations were provided by Dr. Paciencia Milan (VSU), Dr. Edwino Fernando (University of the Philippines-Los Baños), Dr. Juliet Ceniza (VSU), Mr. Marlito Bande (VSU), Sabdulla C. Abubacar (Regional Director, Environmental Management Bureau, Regional 10), and Hon. Eufrazio Maratas, Jr. (LGU-Pilar, Camotes).

Participants: The forum was attended by 65 representatives from the DENR, local government units, public and private sector firms involved in watershed management, peoples' organizations and academia. A majority of the representatives consisted of protected area superintendents from the different regions of Mindanao.

Outcome and Course Follow-Up: Most of the action plans developed during the forum focused on working in protected areas, which are in urgent need of forest restoration due to continuous threats of illegal logging, mining, conversion to agriculture, and other unsustainable land use practices, despite legal instruments in place to conserve them. The protected areas are an extremely important target for forest restoration because they hold the majority of endemic, rare, and critically endangered flora and fauna in the country, as well as provide important ecosystem services to surrounding areas. Although the management objectives and land tenure status of protected areas are relatively clear, protected area managers have difficulties in implementing forest restoration plans because they lack sufficient technical knowledge about native species. The forum participants, enthusiastic about undertaking forest restoration in their own regions, thus requested additional hands-on training on Rainforestation. ELTI and VSU will provide that training in early February 2011 and will follow up with participants as they further refine and implement their action plans.



This event was possible thanks to Arcadia Fund, whose Environmental Conservation grants support programmes that protect and enhance biodiversity, and provide field training and academic research.