

COURSE REPORT

Rainforestation Nursery Establishment and Seedling Production Training Series

Aborlan, Palawan, Philippines
July 31-August 2, 2012

A course sponsored by:

Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI)
Institute of Tropical Ecology And Environmental Management, Visayas State University (ITEEM-VSU)
Non-Timber Forest Products-Task Force (NTFP-TF)
Nagakaisang Mga Tribu ng Palawan (United Tribes of Palawan or NATRIPAL)

Background: The Philippine government has long recognized the need to restore forest cover to large areas of the archipelago that have been deforested and remain degraded. Large-scale reforestation programs, however, have typically not achieved their goals due to an array of problems. Technical shortcomings include inadequate site-species matching, the usage of poor quality seedlings, an over-reliance on exotics, and the lack of maintenance. Other obstacles have been more socio-political in nature, namely, the lack of clear tenure, overlapping and conflicting policies, limited involvement of local communities and other stakeholders, and inequitable cost and benefit sharing.

On February 24, 2011, President Benigno S. Aquino III issued Executive Order 26, launching the National Greening Program (NGP), the latest such government effort, which targets the reforestation of 1.5 million hectares with 1.5 billion trees by 2016. The NGP includes some progressive elements, indicating that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the primary implementing agency, has learned from its past mistakes. However, other lessons remain to be applied, and roadblocks in the first years of implementation have emerged due to institutional constraints.

Recognizing the great potential of the NGP, and wanting to steer it towards greater effectiveness, the Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI) and its constituent members have been working closely with the DENR to increase the usage of a diverse number of native species, as well as to promote greater involvement of local communities through community nurseries and more hands-on site implementation. This extended process of engagement was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the DENR Secretary and two RFRI members, the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation (PTFCF) and the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE). The MOA was followed shortly after with the issuance of a DENR Memorandum Circular, instructing the regional



field offices to work with the PTFCF and FPE-network of people's organizations (POs), and to transition to the use of native species in all forest areas.

In support of this initiative, ELTI and ITEEM-VSU designed a training program on nursery establishment and management and native seedlings production for the PO partners of RFRI that are involved in the NGP. This training fulfills a major requirement set by the DENR for community participation in the NGP, and is the first of the training series that is currently being planned.

Course Objectives:

- Provide participants with a thorough understanding of the National Greening Program and the mechanisms for their involvement under the PTFCF-FPE MOA;
- Introduce participants to Rainforestation and how this strategy addresses both environmental and social concerns of reforestation; and,
- Train the participants to establish native species nurseries, and collect, and raise good quality planting material.

Course Format: For the first training, ELTI and ITEEM-VSU worked with NTFP-TF, and its network of partners, including NATRIPAL. The 3-day training was held in Barangay Sagpangan, Aborlan, and provided participants with a field-based orientation to Rainforestation, particularly on nursery establishment and seedling production. Resource people consisted of Engr. Jimmy Pogosa and For. Hernando Mondal from ITEEM-VSU, Ms. Kate Mana-Galido from NTFP-TF, and Ms. Hazel Consunji from ELTI. The training, however, was interactive throughout the 3 days, as participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences on the topics discussed, leveraging on the importance of indigenous knowledge, skills and practices.

The morning session of the first day consisted of presentations on the NGP and RFRI network involvement; Philippine biodiversity: socio-economic importance, threats and conservation measures; basic principles of Rainforestation; and, steps in nursery establishment and seedling production. In the afternoon session, lessons from the morning presentations were immediately applied as the participants, especially from the host community, were guided by the resource people in choosing the most appropriate location for a community nursery. The group then began to work on building the nursery using materials found on site, such as bamboo, coconut fronds, and rattan strips, while the other participants prepared and bagged the potting media, making adjustments to the normal mix based on local site conditions.

The second day was spent entirely in the field, starting with an introduction to tree identification, phenology and mapping of mother trees. The group hiked to a nearby forest site where they learned the proper way to collect wildlings. The group then returned to the nursery, prepared the wildlings for transplanting, and potted them in the polybags. Inoculation with mycorrhizae and seed treatment were also covered. The group constructed a recovery chamber for the newly transplanted wildlings, a strategy used in Rainforestation to increase the rate of survival of wildlings, and to lessen the maintenance costs and labor input during the first 2-3 months in the nursery. In the afternoon, the



group learned how to lay out a reforestation site following the NGP guidelines, and how to properly plant trees and maintain the site.

The third day started with a case study of a community-based Reforestation site in Leyte province, which talked about the evolution of a community from one marked by unsustainable land-use practices to a nationally-recognized, "model" people's organization. The case study discussed the PO's cooperative agreement and by-laws that outlined, among other things, the cost-and-benefit sharing scheme within the organization. The participants were walked through the sharing scheme with a group exercise using seedling production as an example. In order to assess the degree of learning from the course as a whole, the participants were divided into several groups and participated in a contest, in which they had to answer review questions. The training ended with a planning session, with individual PO representatives developing action plans for their respective organizations, and enumerating what they would do as soon as they returned to their own communities. The session was closed with a discussion on how to overcome some of the obstacles that may arise in implementing their action plans.

Participants: There were 25 participants representing 11 Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPO) from across the island of Palawan, local academic institutions, local DENR, and the local government unit. The IPOs are affiliated with PTFCF and NTFP-TF and are already in the process of becoming officially involved in the NGP implementation.

Outcome: Together, the participants successfully established a native species nursery in the community of Sagpangan. Each of the representatives from the other ten IPOs will now take the lead in echoing the training to their IPO members and establishing a native species nursery in their respective communities. All of the representatives were provided with a course certification, which makes them a step closer to being eligible to participate in the NGP. NTFP-TF and NATRIPAL, with the help of other RFRI members, will also provide back-up support to the IPOs in their dealings with the DENR.



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.