Headline: Nature-based solutions in climate response

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The country's Philippine Development Plan (PDP) (2023-2028) assessed the progress in environmental and climate action in the last six years as modest. Progress can be seen in the increase in forest cover by 3.03 percent from 2015 to 2020 and the general improvement in the management of protected areas. However, the PDP also cited that these positive gains still fall short of improving the country's overall performance in these sectors.

In the 2022 Environmental Performance Index ranking, the Philippines placed 158th out of 180 countries in environmental sustainability, which covers performance indicators on ecosystem vitality (e.g., biodiversity, water resources), environmental health (e.g., air quality, waste management), and climate change.

In the 2022 World Risk Index, the Philippines ranked first among 193 countries with the highest disaster risks. The PDP noted that between 2011 and 2021, the country incurred P673.30 billion worth of damage and losses due to tropical cyclones alone. These damages and losses from climate change are expected to reach up to 7.6 percent and 13 percent of the country's gross domestic product by 2030 and 2040, respectively, if there is no adequate action to address the impact of climate change. Hence, the PDP strategy framework to Accelerate Climate Action and Strengthen Disaster Resilience will prioritize enhancing adaptation as a priority climate action in the country.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) are key to sustaining the provision of ecosystem goods and services, reducing the intersecting vulnerabilities, and addressing complexities in managing the compounding and cascading risks posed by climate change across forestry, biodiversity, water, and other sectors.

NBS, or actions meant to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, can address climate change in three ways:

1. Avoid or reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to deforestation and land use change and degradation;

2. Capture and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere;

3. Enhance the resilience of ecosystems, and support communities to adapt to climate hazards such as flooding, sea-level rise, and more frequent and intense droughts, floods, heat waves, and wildfires.

The protection and restoration of forests, mangroves, and wetlands, conservation of biodiversity, coastal and marine resources, and creation of urban greenspaces are major adaptation measures the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will relentlessly pursue using integrated and ecosystem-based approaches. These initiatives demonstrate the positive role that nature plays in delivering tangible climate benefits and the potential of NBS for disaster risk reduction.

Integrating nature and climate change as a climate solution provides co-benefits such as job creation, addressing biodiversity loss, and a healthier environment. For instance, the use of a riparian wetland for flood mitigation may also support local fisheries, water quality, recreation, erosion control, biodiversity, and water nutrient management.

As part of the continuing implementation of the risk resiliency program under the Cabinet Cluster on Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation, and Disaster Risk Reduction, resilience road maps with investment portfolio for risk resilience were recently developed for the provinces in the country that are vulnerable to climate change. These planning documents seek to strengthen province-based planning and budgeting by recommending actions to manage risks and address the provinces' climate and disaster vulnerabilities. The participation of private sector partners is critical in increasing the implementation of these climate- and disaster-related investments, especially in the most vulnerable areas in the country.

The private sector plays an important role in better driving meaningful initiatives for the planet. For example, the Land Bank of the Philippines has been implementing the Gawad Sibol (Adopt-A-Watershed) Program in partnership with the DENR since 2006, which pursues the environmental rehabilitation of open and degraded watershed areas through tree planting.

Just recently, Nestlé, One Tree Planted, and EcoPlanet Bamboo started a major reforestation project in Lanao del Sur to plant 3.5 million bamboo clumps and native trees by 2024. I took part in the tree-growing activity at the La Mesa Watershed and Eco Park that was conducted in support of the project's launch and to demonstrate the spirit of volunteerism among Nestlé PH employees and their partners.

As we traverse the pathway to achieving significant outcomes for sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient development in the Philippines, the government, with the other stakeholders, will ensure mainstreaming nature in climate action decisions. Nature is our only opportunity to secure a sustainable future for all.

Through all these, we recognize the importance of working with the private sector in fulfilling our mandate to protect and conserve the country's natural resources. Thus, the DENR will continue fostering meaningful public-private partnerships that can advance our shared environmental goals and help widen the reach and impact of our initiatives.

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