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Headline: DOF: Annual fund to combat climate change underutilized

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Despite a replenishable P1-billion People's Survival Fund for climate adaptation projects, only less than a third of the financing made available five years ago had been tapped by local governments and community organizations, the Department of Finance (DOF) said on Wednesday.

Citing a report from the Bureau of the Treasury, the DOF said the People's Survival Fund board it chairs so far green-lit P310.34 million in projects in the following six municipalities: Del Carmen, Surigao del Norte; Gerona, Tarlac; Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte; Lanuza, Surigao del Sur; Maitum, Sarangani; and San Francisco, Cebu.

There was a flurry of applications—129 proponents from local government units (LGUs) and local community organizations had pitched 172 project proposals worth a total of P14.57 billion, the Treasury report also showed.

"However, most of the proposals submitted to the People's Survival Fund have failed to pass the initial screening due to incomplete documents or because the project activities are not eligible. People's Survival Fund projects should clearly address the community's climate vulnerabilities based on scientific and historical data," the DOF explained.

"The objective of People's Survival Fund projects is to provide an effective combination of engineering and non-engineering interventions, which directly address the area's climate risks, and capacity building programs designed to empower the community and ensure project sustainability," the DOF explained.

It also acts as a supplement to projects that are not government-funded, according to the DOF.

In 2012, Republic Act No. 10174 amended the Climate Change Act of 2009 and established the People's Survival Fund, but its annual funding was only introduced in the 2015 national budget. Since it remained underutilized, the People's Survival Fund has yet to be replenished.

Disbursements to the eight recipient-municipalities has also been slow, with only P147.46 million released to date.

"The Treasury, which sits as alternate chair of the People's Survival Fund board, attributed this low disbursement rate to delays in project implementation owing to uncontrollable events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters affecting the project sites, and the conduct of national elections," the DOF said.

Only the municipality of Del Carmen was on time in implementing its project, said National Treasurer Rosalia V. de Leon, as quoted by the DOF. About P39.24 million, or 48.6 percent of the P80.7-million approved financing, has already been disbursed.

"To encourage more LGUs to access the People's Survival Fund, the board has simplified the requirements for submitting a valid proposal. The original 14 requirements were reduced to only

four: letter of intent, accomplished project proposal template, annual investment plan, and adaptation references,” the DOF added. —BEN O. DE VERA

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