

GREENIN' Philippines:

beyond tree planting...creating real forests

Background and Rational

Global climate change is a widespread and growing concern that has led to extensive international discussions and negotiations. Many of the activities we do every day such as turning the lights on, cooking food, or heating or cooling our homes rely on energy sources like coal and oil that emit carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere. We are taking millions of years worth of carbon, stored beneath the earth as fossil fuels, and releasing it into the atmosphere. By now the planet has 392 parts per million CO₂ – and this number is rising by about 2 parts per million every year.

The world's leading climate scientists have now revised the highest safe level of CO₂ to 350 parts per million. Unless we are able to rapidly return to below 350 ppm this century, we risk reaching tipping points and irreversible impacts that are detrimental to all lives existing on Earth.

One option for slowing the rise of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, and thus possible climate change, is to increase the amount of carbon removed by and stored in forests. Aside from this, forests reduce flooding, improve water quality, improve air quality, preserve and increase the diversity of plants and animals and increase the beauty of the environment.

But over the years, the Philippines' forest resources degenerated because of massive logging activities, fuelwood gathering and charcoal making, shifting cultivation and permanent agriculture. With continued deforestation, some species are now endangered or even extinct. In fact, the Philippines is one of the biodiversity 'hot spots' or areas of concern in the world.

The reasons for failure in reforestation efforts are legion, ranging from technical to social issues. Poor species-site matching, inadequate monitoring, corruption and social conflict are some of the major reasons. Addressing these problems in parallel with any environmental rehabilitation and protection undertakings can significantly increase our forest cover.

The Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc. (RAFI) formed the Generation, REdemption, and Expansion of Natural resources INitiatives in the Philippines (GREENIN' Philippines) to provide effective ways to arrest degradation of forestlands with the end view of making the country greener and healthier.

Program Description

The GREENIN' Philippines is anchored on the lessons and insights gained from years of undertaking sound and viable environmental interventions. It is designed to enhance and/or maintain environmental integrity by restoring biodiversity. It seeks to develop,

protect, enhance and co-manage denuded forestlands, brushlands and degraded residual natural forests. The program is expected to have more partners that will share its vision of rehabilitating the environment through the use of native trees. Moreover, in the next three to five years, there will be forest patches created throughout the Philippines brought about the initiatives undertaken by its stakeholders and partners. These forests, which shall be the future homes of wildlife, shall be carefully protected and managed to ensure a healthy population of the wildlife residing therein. It is also the hope of the Program that the Filipinos will be more assertive and responsive in addressing the important environmental issues that already have greatly affected us all.

The reforestation component of GREENIN' Philippines deviates from the traditional tree planting activities in the country which have reportedly not reaped much success. GREENIN' Philippines will orchestrate to make real forests in critical areas like watersheds and denuded forestlands by developing value-based capabilities of the Program's stakeholders and partners to co-manage program implementation. Post-planting activities are performed to ensure that planted seedlings grow to become forests.

Native tree nurseries are maintained as support mechanism of the program. GREENIN' Philippines strongly advocates the planting of native tree species as these species promote biodiversity restoration faster than exotic ones. These make GREENIN' Philippines a different strategy from the rest.

The GREENIN' Philippines has the Province of Cebu for its pilot area. Taking from the Cebu model, the Program shall be gradually implemented in the different regions of the country. This is to ensure that the Program will be properly managed and implemented while building up relevant lessons and best practices from those who have implemented the program ahead.

The following are the objectives of the Program:

1. establish a broader scope and create significant impact
2. meet the needs of existing and potential clients and partners whose environmental thrusts and directions include its companies, subsidiaries, networks and members outside Cebu
3. contribute to the national and global goal for sustainable development through environmental program initiatives and interventions
4. upscale RAFI's good practices and experience in environmental management

Program Strategies and Approaches

1. Partnership Broadening and Strengthening/Network and Linkage Building

At present, there are various agencies promoting and advocating (forest) environmental protection and rehabilitation. Tapping and pooling these resources would efficiently enhance the implementation and management of an integrated and holistic biodiversity program using native trees and vegetation as major sources of reforestation materials. These will streamline, harness, and/or broaden the impact of the biodiversity program.

It is also important that under this approach the institutionalization of the Program will be established and installed. Proper governance structures and systems designed will enable the effective and efficient delivery of program components and services. The involvement of all environment stakeholders and the full participation and support of the government which has the ascendancy and mandate to ensure environmental integrity will also be sought.

The *Paddle Principle*, or *bugsay* in the Cebuano term, which serves as the keystone of the Program, shall be introduced to its stakeholders and partners. The paddle connotes teamwork and collaboration where stakeholders and partners move in the same direction to achieve the vision of creating a greener and healthier Philippines. The *bugsay* means the responsibility and accountability of one's action, leading by example and having the passion to make a difference in the environment.

2. Establishment of Native Trees Nursery

To be able to provide quality native seedlings and educate the partners on the significance of growing native tree species in environmental rehabilitation, the Program established the RAFI Native Trees and Vetiver Grass Nursery. The nursery actively source out seeds and wildlings and maintain and nurture these stocks for dispersal. At present, the nursery maintains a minimum of 80,000 seedlings representing more than 140 species at varying growth stages.

The Program also establishes satellite nurseries to facilitate the effective and efficient production and delivery of planting materials to respective planting sites. The native trees nursery of the Cebu Industrial Park Developers Inc. in Balamban, Cebu has been identified as one of its satellite nurseries. The Municipalities of San Francisco, Camotes Island, Cebu and Aloguinsan, Cebu were also identified as satellite nurseries to cater to seedling requirements of the northern and southern towns and cities of Cebu, respectively.

The creation of native trees nurseries all over the country is very crucial in achieving program objectives. The species which will be stocked in the nurseries in the different regions will serve as an 'inventory' of the tree species found in a particular area.

Further, this would also educate nursery operators on the importance in taking care of the seedlings even at an early stage to ensure that the trees growing in future forests are of superior quality.

3. Capacity and Capability Enhancement

GREENIN' Philippines builds the capacity of its partners and stakeholders to enable effective participation in the implementation process. Training programs are made available for stakeholders and partners. Information sharing of best practices is done through meetings, fora, conferences and tri-media.

The capacity building programs are effective in making program players aware of systems they can use to participate in program implementation and to some extent enhance their participation in monitoring the program.

Special courses in native tree nursery development and management shall be made available to the program partners and their workers and volunteers.

4. The *Tree that Binds*

This approach will give opportunity to the partners to partake in maintaining the trees until these reach its mature stage. Different batches or groups of company employees, students, campers, hikers and other groups will take care of the following: planting of the seedlings, weeding the immediate surrounding of the seedlings, applying fertilizer and periodic patrolling or monitoring of the established plantation for two years to ensure the survival of the trees. The result of these undertakings will create groups of volunteers who are bound by their responsibility to nurture a tree. This will also cultivate their willingness to rehabilitate the environment which merely tree planting alone cannot generate. This collaborative way of rehabilitating the environment is effective since the "tree owners" are updated on the status of their tree which will further motivate them to ensure tree survival.

Since the volunteers come from different localities, communities and field of interests, technology would play a vital role for group communication. Networking sites such as Facebook and personal blogging sites/accounts such as Twitter and Blogspot, chatrooms and emails will be used to connect with these volunteers.

This approach will also go beyond the fun elements of being in the outdoor. It will provide opportunities for every Filipino citizen to play an important role in locally greening the environment while globally mitigating the impacts of climate change. The program shall create 'walking champions' who know the necessity of nurturing trees to create real forests.

5. Pooling of Experts

Since experts have prolonged or intense experience through practice and education

in their respective fields, they will be tapped to help in mobilizing the program. Wildlife experts, agriculturists, horticulturists, pedologists, entomologist and foresters can readily give technical advice and assistance in certain areas of concern that have bearing on program interventions. This can surely maximize resources without resorting to the trial-and-error run in implementation.

Program Management and Administration

RAFI will serve as the program and process holder of GREENIN' Philippines. It will facilitate a process that will enjoin stakeholders and partners to commit and adopt the Program in their respective geographical areas. To ensure effective and efficient implementation of program interventions, it shall link potential partners to the Program and engage them to participate in all levels of program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It will also provide the necessary technical support to stakeholders and partners to ensure proper management, administration and sustainability of the Program.

Partners shall collaborate with and support RAFI by adopting the GREENIN' Philippines Program as an effective mechanism to conserve and rehabilitate the environment. They will serve champions of the Program and cascade program purpose, principles, systems, processes, approaches, and interventions to their respective companies, networks, and members. They shall also institutionalize a system that will ensure the adoption of the GREENIN' Philippines Program.

The partners will also be required to set-up native tree nurseries in identified areas that adopt and subscribe to the standards and criteria indicated in the Nursery Operations Manual.

Sustainability

Program approaches will be geared towards sustaining the different components of GREENIN' Philippines. Partners that have been capacitated and strengthened will play a key role in institutionalizing and sustaining the different environmental interventions initiated by the Program and mainstreamed in their systems and structures.

They will ensure that environmental interventions are anchored to an environment framework and will likewise mobilize other partners in implementing interventions that promote the health of the environment.