

WORKSHOP REPORT

Rainforestation Network Forum

Quezon City, the Philippines
July 22, 2009

A workshop sponsored by:
Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI)

Rationale: It is estimated that the Philippines has lost approximately one-third of its forest cover since the early 1990s and that primary forests now account for less than three percent of the country's total land area. This dramatic transformation in the country's landscapes has been driven over many decades primarily by legal and illegal logging, agricultural expansion, mining, and widespread fuel-wood collection by rural communities. Critical environmental goods and services have been lost, disasters such as landslides and flashfloods attributed to deforestation have become more common, and the livelihoods of many rural and indigenous communities have been compromised. To counter these problems, national and local reforestation projects have been implemented throughout the country, starting as early as the 1960s, but most of them have used fast-growing, exotic tree species, which are not particularly well-suited to the conditions of the country's ecosystems.

Starting in the 1990s, Visayas State University (VSU) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation started to develop an agro-forestry system known as "rainforestation farming", which uses native species to rehabilitate degraded landscapes, restore key ecosystem services and functions, while providing forest-dependent communities with an alternative source of livelihood. Subject to extensive research and experimentation, "rainforestation farming" has been refined into a very cost-effective and widely-applicable method for reforestation, even as non-farm-oriented Rainforestation methodologies have also been developed. Since then, other organizations, including Haribon Foundation and the Foundation for the Philippine Environment, have adopted Rainforestation and developed a number of project sites across the Philippines, with VSU continuing its scientific and technical support role.

With strong advocacy from Haribon, Rainforestation has been adopted by the Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as the country's official reforestation strategy. Haribon also launched the "Road to 2020", a movement to reforest a million hectares by 2020 with native species. Progress towards that goal, and the widespread adoption of Rainforestation more generally, however, have been hampered by an array of technical, administrative, and other obstacles. ELTI and VSU recently held two Rainforestation Trainer's Training Programs (and plan to hold another later this year), in order to increase the pool of individuals with the knowledge and skills to develop Rainforestation sites. For Rainforestation to reach its full potential in reversing the widespread damage to the Philippines forest ecosystems, however, the other obstacles need to be addressed as well.



Objectives: The workshop was designed to bring together the primary organizations and institutions that are currently working on Rainforestation or which have shown interest in greater involvement, to assess the possibility of developing a strategic partnership in addressing the remaining obstacles. The main objectives of the workshop were as follows:

1. To provide updated information on each organizations' Rainforestation-related initiatives, including (but not limited to) locations and size of Rainforestation sites, partnering organizations, new Rainforestation practices and methodologies adopted, obstacles faced, and opportunities for further engagement.
2. To conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats) analysis of Rainforestation as currently practiced so as to identify areas where additional science, training, implementation, and advocacy are needed; and
3. To consolidate efforts and resources to address the needs through a proposed formal network and development of a joint work plan.

Participants: The workshop was attended by 20 representatives from a variety of organizations and institutions, including Haribon, the Foundation for the Philippine Environment, Conservation International, the Philippine Native Plant Conservation Initiative, University of the Philippines-Los Baños, VSU, the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation, and First Philippine Conservation Incorporated.

Outcome: All organizations involved in the workshop agreed to revitalize and expand the Rainforest Restoration Initiative (RFRI), which had been created as a technical group during the launching of the Road to 2020, but which had never become particularly active. The meeting also resulted in the development of a work plan for RFRI members, which included commitments to take the following actions: 1) develop a RFRI website as a central clearing house of information on Rainforestation; 2) create of a common agenda and united-front negotiating strategy with DENR over such issues as land availability for reforestation and the DENR's continued usage of exotics in large-scale reforestation projects; 3) raise awareness of the importance of natives species reforestation during such events as the upcoming League of Municipalities Annual Conference and Social Development Week in Manila; 4) develop reference and technical materials, including an e-library on native plants, a series of Dipterocarp fact sheets, and Rainforestation photoguides; 5) hold an advanced botanical training program for Rainforestation trainers; and 6) begin planning for a National Forum on Native Species Reforestation.

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