

Executive Order No. 26: Towards a Greener Philippines¹

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Introduction

Historically, the Philippines had lost at least 80% of its original forest cover since the 16th century (Remollino, 2004). In fact, forest cover decreased by 328,682 hectares (ha), that is, from 7,168,400 ha in 2003 to 6,839,718 ha in 2010 (DENR). This translates an annual forest cover loss of 46,954 ha.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) in its 2003 report, *The State of the World's Forests*, places the Philippines' rate of deforestation at 1.4% annually from 1990 to 2000 (or 80,000 ha). This situation had earned the country the notoriety in Southeast Asia as the only country with the thinnest forest cover.

To reverse this trend, the Philippines government initiated the National Greening Program (NGP) as a massive forest rehabilitation program established through the issuance of Executive Order (EO) No. 26 signed by President Benigno S. Aquino III on February 24, 2011.

The primary mandate of the development of the program comes with the associated tasks of national struggle against poverty, food insecurity, environment instability and biodiversity loss, and climate change problem.

It mandates the DA-DAR-DENR Convergence Initiative³ to be the oversight committee of the program, with DENR as the lead agency, in cooperation with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the private sector and other concerned agencies and institutions.

The said EO supports and complements earlier directives by President Aquino. These include EO No. 23⁴ that bans logging in natural and residual forests, as well as Proclamation No. 125, declaring 2011 as the National Year of Forests in the Philippines (Briefer on NGP, 2011).

¹ A short policy paper submitted to the Food and Fertilizer Technology Center (FFTC) for the project titled "Asia-Pacific Information Platform in Agricultural Policy". Short policy papers, as corollary outputs of the project, describe pertinent Philippine laws and regulations on agriculture, aquatic and natural resources.

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³ Pursuant to Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1 Series 2010, the Department of Agriculture (DA) – Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) – Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have adopted a Convergence Initiative to integrate and strengthen development framework between and among national and local government agencies and other stakeholders.

⁴ EO No. 23: Declaring a Moratorium on the Cutting and Harvesting of Timber in the Natural and Residual Forests and Creating the Anti-illegal Logging Task Force

Extent and coverage

The program targets to grow 1.5 billion trees covering about 1.5 million ha of public lands nationwide within a span of six years, from 2011 to 2016 – more than twice the government’s accomplishment for the past 25 years, which adds to about 730,000 ha. Half of the targeted trees to be planted under the DA-DAR-DENR Convergence Initiative would constitute forest tree species intended for timber production and protection. The remaining 50% would comprise of agroforestry species.

Areas eligible for the rehabilitation program include forestlands, mangrove and protected areas, ancestral domains, civil and military reservation, urban greening areas, inactive and abandoned mine sites and other suitable lands. In addition to the direct effects of reforestation, the program seeks to indirectly improve water quality in rivers and irrigation for farm lands, reduce the potential for flooding, soak up carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, and lay down a strong foundation for an expanded wood-products economy.

Implementation strategies

Taking into account the social, ecological and policy imperatives mentioned above, all government agencies and institutions, including local government units (LGU), are mandated to provide full support for the program, not only in terms of tree planting, but also in the production of quality seedlings and the mobilization of government employees, students (from Grade 5 to college level) as well as private sectors to plant at least 10 seedlings each, annually.

The People Organizations (POs) with the appropriate assistance from the government and the private sector are tapped to be responsible in maintaining and protecting the established plantations. In return of their services, they are to become beneficiaries under the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Program of the DSWD.

The NGP also unifies and integrates all greening efforts such as the Upland Development Program, *Luntiang Pilipinas* and similar initiatives of the private sector and civil society.

To account for the progress of the NGP, geo-tagging is one of the technologies being used by the program to promote transparency and good governance. As a monitoring tool, geo-tagged photos show the status of the plantation sites anywhere in the country thereby facilitating validation and evaluation of sites.

Current developments and criticisms

Since its inception, a total of 397 million seedlings was planted in 683,000 ha land area (Table 1). This figure represents 46% of the government’s target area generating more than one million jobs and volunteer partners.

Table 1. National Greening Program annual accomplishment.

Year	Target Area (ha)	Area Planted (has)	Percent (%) Accomplishment of Area Planted	Number of seedling planted	Jobs Generated (No. Of POs, Extension Officers And Laborers Hired)	No. of Volunteer planters (POs, Students, NGAs, OGAs, NGOs, CSOs, Private Sector, Others)
Total	1,500,000	683,481	46%	397,769,713	1,182,764	1,574,741
2011	100,000	128,558	129%	89,624,121	335,078	715,552
2012	200,000	221,763	111%	125,596,730	380,696	387,472
2013	300,000	333,160	111%	182,548,862	466,990	471,717
2014	300,000					
2015	300,000					
2016	300,000					

Source: <http://ngp.denr.gov.ph/index.php/site-administrator/ngp-accomplishment-report>

During the last four years (2010-2013), there was an increasing trend of budget allocation for NGP with an annual average growth rate of 77 percent. In fact, in 2013, DENR has earmarked some Php7.6 billion from DBM’s recommended budget worth Php23.62 billion. Among DENR’s key expenditure programs, NGP got the share of Php5.7 billion or 75 percent of the total (Figure 1). This is a manifestation that the current administration is seriously laying down its necessary requisites for quicker facilitation and more efficient implementation of the NGP.

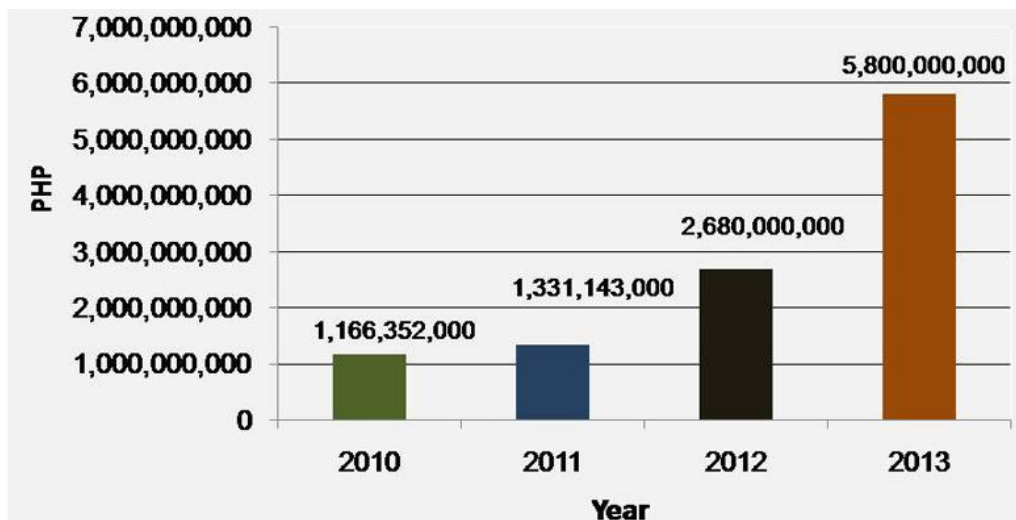


Figure 1. Budget of the National Greening Program
(Source: <http://ngp.denr.gov.ph/index.php/site-map/ngp-budget>)

Although the program is lauded as one of the government’s “well thought out” projects, civil society partners of the DENR like the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation Inc (PTFCF) and the Foundation for the Philippine Environment (FPE) said that the program is being rushed to reach the 2016 deadline at the expense of the quality, growth and resilience of trees being planted. Majority of the trees being planted are exotic like *mahogany*, *gmelina*, and rubber – trees that are fast-growing but less

adaptive to the Philippine environment. They further argue that native species like narra, dipterocarps, and the Philippine mahogany are the kinds of trees that should be planted due to its high survival and its fulfillment of the mission of the NGP to restore Philippine forests⁵.

Initiatives for 2014⁶

For 2014, NGP is aiming for some 300,000 ha of forestlands across the country using some 164 million seedlings for production. In order to carry out this target, current initiatives include site preparation, operation of clonal nurseries and production areas for *mycorrhiza* plant growth booster, establishment of seed production areas per region as well as hiring of 1,200 environment and natural resources extension officers and maintenance of seedlings planted in the targeted 300,000 ha.

In addition, targets are also realigned for highly valued commodities such as timber (Falcata), rubber, coffee and cacao especially in Mindanao areas where these commodities abound and expected to benefit POs through livelihood activities.

The recent super typhoon Yolanda, also known as Haiyan that struck the archipelago in 2013, had tested the country's readiness to respond to a calamity of this magnitude. In turn, NGP is realigning some of its targets for mangrove establishment and rehabilitation. This is meant particularly to safeguard coastal areas vulnerable to possible storm surges like those in the eastern seaboard of Visayas.

Conclusion

The relatively young NGP under the DA-DAR-DENR Convergence Initiative is only a preliminary stride to bring back the already exhausted forests in the Philippines at its prime since 2011. Other than the infusion of sufficient financial and manpower resources, a better reforestation program is attainable if its implementers can sufficiently monitor activities and effectively implement changes in operations to address the problems. At the end of the day, good development on the endeavor towards achieving a greener picture of the Philippines is a collective decision and effort that all stakeholders have to make.

⁵ Jose Andres Canivel of PTCFC further account the advantages of planting native trees, see: <http://www.rappler.com/nation/51200-national-greening-program-native-trees>

⁶ Partly lifted from Irma S. Paulme article titled "NGP Gears Up for 2014"

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