



Mining firm leads mangrove reforestation

Biodiversity

by Butch Enerio - May 2, 2015



In Photo: Participants in the planting of mangrove propagules wade through the shallow water to the planting site.

BAROBO, Surigao del Sur—In a gesture to give back what it takes from nature, a mining firm that has received awards for its best practices in the industry has embarked on the rehabilitation of mangrove forests by planting propagules in an area here that was once richly vegetated with the marine plant.

Hundreds of Philsaga Mining Corp. (PMC) employees, members of the organizations belonging to barangays Wakat and Talisay Small Fishermen and civil servants from the local government of this town trooped to the beach on April 30 and planted more than 12,000 propagules, covering 5 hectares of denuded mangrove forest.

PMC's mangrove reforestation is a three-year, three-phase endeavor starting this year. The first phase is the planting and the succeeding phases would focus on maintenance and protection. PMC President Raul Villanueva, who led the planting, said the endeavor is PMC's contribution to the global campaign against climate change and help mitigate its effects by conserving and restoring coastal marine ecosystems.

"This endeavor, although [it] covers only a few hectares, is already a contribution with the hope that we, in PMC, could fill in the need for the protection of marine ecosystem in this part of the country," Villanueva said. He added: "Ours is a gesture to give back what we take from the earth, our obligation."

PMC said the project aims to empower concerned communities to work for the protection and conservation of remaining forest in their respective locality while initially earning their livelihood through the funding support that the mining firm extends to the project. Studies made by experts proved that mangroves, sea grasses and tidal marshes are critical to mitigating climate-change impacts and improving human well-being.

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) said mangrove forests are one of the most severely threatened and undervalued ecosystems on earth. Mangroves provide a wide variety of ecosystem services, currently valued globally at \$1.6 billion.

For many coastal communities, mangrove ecosystems provide livelihoods, essential sources of protein and coastal protection.

Compelling evidence suggests that mangroves play an important role in climate stabilization, processing carbon storage and sequestration potential considered to be greater than that of tropical forests, the study says.

ZSL's study further indicates that mangroves are being cleared at an alarming rate and there are numerous threats to these forests, including land development, pollution, deforestation for fuel and climate change. Coastal vegetation dubbed, "blue carbon" by planting and conserving mangroves, sea grasses and salt marsh grasses, is one of the most promising ideas to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide and limit global climate change.

It sequesters carbon far effectively 100 times faster and more permanently than terrestrial forest, the study says.

One of the major reasons for the loss of mangroves has been the establishment of fishponds for aquaculture. It has been estimated that since 1980 between 20 percent and 30 percent of global mangroves have been lost, roughly 1 percent per year. The last assessment highlighted that more than one in six mangrove species are currently under extinction.

In the Philippines over 50 percent of mangroves have been lost. The recent Super typhoon Yolanda (international code name Haiyan), which devastated areas in Eastern Visayas, has highlighted the vital role mangroves play to protect vulnerable coastal communities.

A number of companies, such as PMC, as part of their corporate social responsibility, are now cognizant in working to protect the remaining mangroves and restore lost forest, especially through fishpond reversion, helping ensure greater food security, improved protection against natural disasters and increased household incomes for local communities. PMC, in its rubber plantation that covers 401 hectares, has built an agro-forest nursery for the reforestation of more than 300 hectares of denuded forest. It has adopted a major creek and regularly monitors water body cleanup and water quality.

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