

The Philippines' Upland Development Program: cushioning the impacts of global financial crisis and climate change through green jobs

J.L. Atienza, Jr

A new programme will create thousands of jobs in restoring forests and watersheds, helping to mitigate hunger and poverty.

Jose L. Atienza, Jr is Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Government of the Philippines, Quezon City, the Philippines.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines has created the Upland Development Program in support of the government's Economic Resiliency Plan, launched in February 2009 to cushion the impact of the global financial crisis on the Filipino people. The programme aims to improve incomes in upland areas and mitigate hunger, while also enhancing the country's capacity to adapt to climate change. Forestry has a major place in meeting both challenges, since upland populations are highly dependent on forest resources for subsistence and livelihood, and forests serve as a natural carbon sink.

The target of the Upland Development Program is to create more than 52 000 jobs for farmers in upland and coastal areas, in conjunction with the government's Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Programme. The government provides farm inputs including tree seedlings, organic fertilizers and other implements. The farmers' contribution is their labour, for which they will be paid. This strategy enables people in the uplands to devote their time and energies wholly to the rehabilitation of the environment while earning in the process.

In 2009, the Philippine Government has allotted 1.5 billion pesos (roughly US\$30 million) for the implementation of the programme, which will cover more than 52 000 hectares of 180 watersheds supporting major river basins and protected areas. The Upland Development Program integrates other upland programmes

and is envisioned to expand existing initiatives consistent with the country's Medium-Term Development Plan (2004–2010).

Funding will be used for specific activities such as establishment and operation of nurseries, development of forest plantations and agroforestry farms, rehabilitation of river banks, enrichment planting of inadequately stocked areas and assisted natural regeneration, as well as forest maintenance and protection through patrol work. In these activities the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will partner above all with peoples' organizations engaged with the department under community-based forest and resource management agreements. Other partners will include local government units, communities and civil society organizations involved in rehabilitation activities, and smallholders who can benefit from soil and water conservation activities in their landholdings.

An interesting feature of the programme is its strong support to the government's hunger mitigation and poverty alleviation programmes – for example, by helping to meet the raw material requirements of industries involved in the Trade and Industry Department's "One Town One Product" scheme, which encourages towns to specialize in a single product according to local comparative advantage in resources and skills. The scheme's intent is to ramp up production while promoting entrepreneurship and creating income opportunities, especially for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The Upland Development Program's linkage to this scheme ensures ready markets for the products generated under the programme, further enhancing livelihoods of people's organization members.

The stark reality of global financial crisis and climate change increases the urgency of involving and empowering upland communities to carry out the imperatives of conservation, protection and sustainable utilization of forest lands. To this end, the Upland Development Program aims to transform poverty into self-sufficiency and degradation into restoration.

For more information, see: forestry.dnr.gov.ph/SUDP.htm



Upland Development Program site at Mount Kitangland Range Natural Park, the Philippines