

CONFERENCE REPORT

Mainstreaming Native Species-Based Forest Restoration

University of the Philippines-Diliman
July 15-16, 2010

A conference sponsored by:
Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative in cooperation with
members of the Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI)
and the University of the Philippines (UP)

Background: Rainforests have been decimated throughout much of the tropics. Driven by land use policies and practices that favor extractive activities, such as timber, mining, and conversion to agriculture, deforestation and forest degradation have resulted in the widespread loss of ecosystem services, including biodiversity maintenance, carbon sequestration, watershed protection, and the provision of forest products to local communities. In some locations, this land use change has also intensified a variety of 'natural disasters', including flash floods, water shortages, and landslides, which have major human and economic consequences.

In order to reestablish forest cover, and restore the ecosystem services that forests provide, many countries have embarked on large-scale reforestation projects. These reforestation efforts are typically characterized by the use of a small number of fast-growing, non-native, timber species. Reforestation efforts in the Philippines, for example, are dominated by exotics such as Gmelina (*Gmelina arborea*), Falcata (*Albizia falcataria*), Mangium (*Acacia mangium*), Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), and several Eucalyptus species. This usage of exotic timber species is driven by the need to generate an economic return on the investment, as well as by a general lack of knowledge about how to cultivate native trees.



A problem with these reforestation efforts, however, is that the exotics trees are often not particularly well-suited to the ecosystem where they are planted, being prone to disease outbreaks and characterized by higher susceptibility to extreme weather events. They also have limited value in terms of biodiversity maintenance and watershed restoration. In response, researchers and conservation organizations have conducted widespread ecological studies on native trees, and have been experimenting with the usage of these trees for reforestation efforts. Projects of this nature have been established in an array of tropical countries in South and Southeast Asia, South and Central America, and Oceania.





The Philippines is one of the countries where pioneering efforts into Native Species Reforestation has been undertaken. Starting in the early 1990s, Visayas State University, together with GTZ, launched 'Rainforestation Farming,' an agroforestry system which uses native species to rehabilitate degraded land, restore ecosystem services, and generate income for rural communities. Since then, other approaches, known simply as "rainforestation", have also been developed to rehabilitate areas, including land slide areas, critical watersheds, and denuded portions of protected areas, where income generation plays a less important role. Subject to extensive research and experimentation, "rainforestation" has been refined into a very cost-effective and widely-applicable method for reforestation.

While the national Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines has endorsed "rainforestation" as an official reforestation strategy, implementation of this approach at the provincial level has been limited. Moreover, reforestation using exotics still seems to be the main school of thought in many of the country's universities. One of the biggest obstacles is the persistent belief that cultivating native species is particularly difficult—the "conventional wisdom" challenged and refuted by demonstration plots that have been developed throughout the Philippines. Rainforestation also remains largely

unknown to the international scientific community, limiting the possibility for the establishment of cooperative efforts among similar projects that could benefit from each other's expertise and experience.

In order to help address this situation, the Environmental Leadership & Training Initiative (ELTI), in collaboration with other members of the Rain Forest Restoration Initiative (RFRI) and the University of the Philippines (UP), organized a conference to examine native species reforestation efforts in the Philippines and abroad.

Conference objectives:

- Increase awareness and build support for native species reforestation in the Philippines;
- Introduce Rainforestation to international researchers and expose Rainforestation advocates to similar efforts that are underway in other parts of the world, so as to facilitate the sharing of scientific data and project management insights; and
- Serve as a forum to strengthen the network of Rainforestation researchers, advocates, and project implementers in the Philippines.

Conference format: The conference was held at the UP-Diliman. Internet-based simulcasts were made available at the UP-Visayas-Cebu in Cebu City and UP-Mindanao in Davao City, thus providing coverage to the three major administrative regions of the country.

On the first day, Opening Remarks were provided by Dr. Edwino Fernando (UP-Los Baños College of Forestry & Natural Resources), followed by a Keynote Address by Dr. Mark Ashton (Yale School of Forestry & Environmental

Studies). Most of the day consisted of a series of presentations examining several successful native species reforestation efforts from Japan, Hong Kong, Panama, Thailand, and the Philippines. These presentations were followed by a panel discussion exploring the relative advantages and disadvantages of using native tree species and comparing the different reforestation approaches on economic and ecological grounds. A synthesis of the first day was provided by Dr. Perry Ong (UP-Diliman Institute of Biology).

The second day started with Opening Remarks by Dr. Rex Cruz (UP-Los Baños College of Forestry & Natural Resources) and was followed by five moderated panels, each focused on working with one of the following major stakeholders groups to promote the usage of native species and forest restoration: RFRI, the Department of Environment & Natural Resources, Local Communities, Local Government Units, and the Private Sector. Each panel had two or three speakers, who gave short presentations highlighting 'success stories' and their lessons learned, as well as a broader discussion about how to move forward. The second day was wrapped up with the launching of the Reforestation Information Portal (www.rainforestation.ph), an internet site developed by ELTI in cooperation with other members of RFRI, and closing remarks by Dr. Neric Acosta (Asian Institute of Management & Ateneo de Manila University). A small tree planting ceremony for the speakers on the UP-Campus was organized by Mr. Leonard Co (UP-Diliman).

The entire conference was designed by Dr. David Neidel (ELTI-Asia) with input from RFRI members and facilitated by Dr. Cecilia Gascon (Southern Luzon State University), while logistics for the entire event were organized by Ms. Hazel Consunji (ELTI-Asia), with assistance from Ms. Lilian Rodriguez (UP-Diliman), Ms. Joyce Flores (UP-Visayas-Cebu), Dr.Emma Bayogan (UP-Mindanao), Mr. Jonathan Labozzetta (Yale University) and various colleagues from Visayas State University, including Ms. Meray Banoc, Mr. Jimmy Pogosa, Mr. Hernando Ondal, Ms. Pia Noriel, and Ms. Elvira Gorre. Funding for the second day presenters was generously provided by the Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation through its Small Grants Program.

Participants: Over 400 people registered to participate in the conference at one of the three sites. However, due to a typhoon that occurred two days before the event, some people could not attend. Nevertheless, approximately 240 people attended the conference at UP-Diliman, while another 60 participated remotely from UP-Visayas-Cebu and 45 from UP-Mindanao. A partial analysis indicates that the registered participants had the following institutional affiliations: 45% NGO, 30% Academic, 10% Government, 10% Private Sector, and 5% other.



Follow-Up: A Conference Proceedings is currently being written by Mr. Jonathan Labozzetta (Yale University), which will be distributed to relevant stakeholders. ELTI will also continue to work with its partners from RFRI to mainstream the usage of native species for land rehabilitation efforts in the Philippines and elsewhere in the region. The Rainforestation website will serve as an important clearing house of both scientific and applied information on the subject, while a related discussion group listserv will serve to coordinate the growing network of organizations and individuals working to promote rainforestation. ELTI is also exploring various training opportunities for Rainforestation advocates from the Philippines to share their knowledge and experience with forest restoration practitioners from other parts of the region. The ultimate goal is to build up the technical capacity in the Philippines, and indeed the Southeast Asian region as a whole, to design and implement an array of native species reforestation approaches depending on the initial social and ecological site conditions and management goals.

For a complete conference agenda, go to: <http://environment.yale.edu/elti/> and click on the events section.



Rainforestation Information Portal
Promoting the use of native species and forest restoration in the Philippines

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- Academe
- Government
- NGOs
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Discussion Group

Join the buzz about Rainforestation!

Rainforestation: Return of the Natives

With only about 24% remaining forest cover, the Philippines is suffering from the widespread loss of ecosystem services, including biodiversity maintenance, carbon sequestration, watershed protection, and local communities' ability to harvest timber and non-timber forest products. The diminished forest cover has also contributed to the intensification of a variety of 'natural

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