

# Responsible stewardship must include mining

By: **Dindo Manhit** - @inquirerdotnet

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:10 AM February 12, 2017

The recent announcement of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources leadership on the closure of large-scale mines and the suspension of operations of others is yet another indication of the failure to differentiate between being an advocate and a regulator. Since the change in administration, the DENR has been practically focusing on just one thing: large-scale mining.

In the Stratbase ADR Institute publication “Thinking Beyond Politics,” Dr. CP David, holder of a PhD in environmental science and geology from Stanford University, observed, however, that:

“It must also be noted that illegal small-scale mining is responsible for the significant environmental damage being charged to the mining industry at large today. Small-scale mining is largely unregulated, both from an environmental and fiscal perspective. Small-scale miners generally do not have environmental protection or mitigation systems in place, and hardly pay the taxes due to the government. In fact, the term ‘small-scale mining’ has become a misnomer because a lot of operators cannot be considered ‘small’ as defined in the law.”

Moreover, changing the rules or the policies in the middle of the game can never work in any industry or sector. Doing such comes at a much higher price in the context of mining and the Philippine environment. Again, David has his take, thus:

“Any industry, especially in the case of mining where the project cycle extends to more than two decades, requires a consistent policy framework where investments are not threatened by subsequent arbitrary modification. Otherwise, the country will not be able to attract legitimate miners, and so risk losing its resources to illegal mining with the concomitant severe degradation of the environment.”

Clearly, then, the bias against large-scale mining will not result in environmental protection, but rather further degradation, to the detriment of ordinary Filipinos. Of course, this outcome is contrary to the avowed objective of the mining audits to promote “social justice.”

Worse, the rule of law seems to have been brushed aside in the conduct of these audits. For one, the impartiality of the audit teams is questionable, with anti-mining NGOs as influential members. Transparency in the process, as well as the results, has been very poor. The mines concerned are in the dark as to the bases by which they are audited, and the results of such audits.

It is unfortunate that the fears of the mining industry upon the change of administration have become a reality. It is now confirmed that there is failure to transcend being an advocate fighting for a single cause and becoming a regulator looking after and uniting all the stakeholders. To this David calls for consensus-building:

“A tri-sectoral approach, involving government, the private sector, and civil society, will provide a platform for collaboration among relevant stakeholders, all essential cogs in environmental policy-making and implementation. This inclusive approach will hopefully help in pinpointing where the fulcrum should stand between economic development and environmental protection.

“There is no recourse, therefore, but to believe in the power of collaboration.

“The [next] government must lead the way in harnessing the resources and innovation of the private sector, the knowledge of the academe, and the advocacy of NGOs; and build synergy from these. This is the only way toward a responsible stewardship of the environment that meets the needs of both present and future generations.”

The DENR leadership should be reminded that it is part of this administration, which promised the Filipino people better lives. In order to fulfill this commitment, the President is pushing for the country’s industrialization, and mining cannot be taken away from that equation. It should be obvious that the country needs mining that can be linked to mineral processing and down to allied industries, such as manufacturing, in order to generate jobs, increase revenue streams, and, ultimately, boost the economy. This development can never be realized with myopic and irrational leadership.

\* \* \*

*Dindo Manhit is the president of Stratbase ADR Institute.*