

# Gov't reforestation program: Planting the right trees

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MANILA, Philippines - The government has put up a tree seed center (TSC) in Minglanilla within the 123-hectare Cebu Experimental Forest (CEF) which should ramp up support for long term reforestation up to 2028.

This TSC is the first in Visayas and follows the one that was set up in Bislig, Surigao del Sur. Both were established by the Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (ERDB), an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"The prospect of reforestation in Visayas region is bright because the tree seed center will not only be for Region 7 (Cebu) but for the whole Visayas," said ERDB executive director Henry Adornado.

The TSC is part of the forest nursery modernization program in line with the enhanced National Greening Program (NGP) aimed at massively producing quality, disease-free seeds. It has a laboratory that may be used for testing germination of seeds. The Visayas TSC is just waiting for an occupancy permit to start operation.

Availability of a variety of tree species will be enhanced as the TSC as the facility will do seed exchange, according to Alicia Lustica who heads the ERDB research center in Cebu.

The CEF itself is situated in the Philippines' first reforestation project which is now century old. This is the Osmena reforestation project, also the country's oldest reforestation as established in January 1916 and was a 2,710-hectare forest reserve area ran in earlier times by the Vatican known as the Friar Land Estate.

Based on ERDB records, as of June 2015, Region 7 alone had seed collection and supply of 1.222 million.

Seed requirements will increase as Executive Order 193 mandated the extension of the NGP up to 2028 which envisions a wood and agroforestry product self sufficiency set at an annual production target of 750,000 hectares of timber, 60,000 hectares of coffee, and 300,000 hectares of fuelwood.

The production of wood and paper products is estimated to be worth \$900 million yearly.

Partners that may use Visayas TSC's seed production are DENR-ERDB's own provincial, city or municipal environment and natural resources offices (ENRO), state universities and colleges or SUCs, community and people's groups, and private, industrial tree plantations.

The TSC has a seeder area where seeds are sown into containers, and are watered through misting for growth. Germinants are turned into seedlings in the growing area. In the hardening area, sunlight allows for drying of the seedlings for sturdiness.

ERDB has been conducting research in CEF since June 1986, covering bamboo, rattan, dipterocarps (hardwood and tropical trees), narra, endemic tree species, neem, tiger grass, flowers, and honey production. It is also a site for training ENRO researchers on cave ecotourism and forest conservation.

Despite being considered a national heritage and a protected and forest reservation area, it is faced with threats of illegal logging.

“Our forest is still threatened by illegal tree cutting and charcoal extraction. Informal settlement, farming, wildlife hunting, sand, gravel and black stone extract and bamboo harvest are also threats. We need valuable community partners to fight the threats.”

The top 10 tree species here are teak, gmelina, lumbang, lanutan, narra, antsoan dilau, Genguet pine, banaba, and auri.

The CEF site is a biodiversity-rich area. It is home to faunal species as Kokok (Philippine coucal, Alimokon (White eared browndove), Tamsi (sunbird), Maya (Munia), Tikling (Moorhen), Pugo (Buttonquail), Manatad (Common Emerald Dove), Toktor (Barber), Punay, Siloy (Cebu black sharma), Ngiwng (Grass owl), Sayaw (Swift), Kikik (Koel), Gitgit (Swallow), Tagmaya (Bulbul), and Uwak (crow).

“Very native wildlife community in CEF depends on unique plants, caves, rivers, and creeks.”

ERDB received a mandate to put up forest TSCs under NGP. It now has a TCP in Los Banos, Laguna. It is also building TSCs in Loakan, Baguio City; Pagbilao, Quezon; and Tagum City, Davao del Norte.

“Seeds collected from the established seed sources—seed production areas and individual plus trees (SPAs and IPTs)-- nationwide will be submitted to forest TSC for processing and certification before it will be distributed to different stakeholders,” said ERDB.

IPTs are materials in breeding and are selected and crossed with each other as part of producing superior tree breeds.