

Expert urges government to plant mangroves in abandoned fish ponds in coastal areas

*By Jonathan L. Mayuga
Business Mirror, March 9, 2017*

LEGANES, Iloilo—An expert in mangrove-forest conservation is urging the government to plant mangroves in abandoned and illegal-fish ponds, particularly in coastal areas.

Dr. Jurgenne H. Primavera, chief mangrove scientific advisor for the Zoological Society of London, said the Philippines needs to have more mangroves due to its vulnerability to extreme-weather events. Primavera noted mangroves can also contribute to fisheries production, carbon-sequestration, and climate-change mitigation and adaptation.

Primavera, also a scientist emerita of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center's Aquaculture Department in Tigbauan, Iloilo, said there are better economic opportunities waiting for coastal communities if fishponds are reverted into mangrove forest.

Interviewed by the BusinessMirror, Primavera said there are hundreds of abandoned fishponds lying idly and are no longer productive. These areas, she said, expose communities to unnecessary risks of being swept away during storm surges.

Citing the devastation caused by Super typhoon Haiyan (international code name Yolanda), she said most areas with thick mangroves forest in the Visayas were the least affected.

“Mangrove forests are sources of food and fuel, and protect coastal communities,” Primavera said.

Since 2012, Primavera has been advocating for the conversion of abandoned fish ponds into mangroves forests.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources said it is planning to reforest 300,000 hectares of coastal areas by planting native species of mangroves in coastal areas, as well as bamboos in critical watersheds under the Enhanced National Greening Program (E-NGP).

Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez said she wants communities to benefit from “greening” programs, including mining-affected areas, to provide livelihood to communities by protecting the environment.

Primavera, who has been working on mangroves and mangrove conservation in the Visayas since 1975, said people in coastal communities have very poor appreciation of mangroves and their economic benefits.

“Many mangrove areas were destroyed to put up fish ponds,” she added.

Primavera said rehabilitating these areas will allow coastal communities to benefit from having a healthy mangrove forests—including sufficient fish stock, shrimps, crabs and other seashells.

She also recommended assisted natural regeneration of mangrove forests through establishment of nurseries and planting of wildings, saying it allows recovery of coastal ecosystems faster than natural regeneration.

An audit of Fishpond Lease Agreements issued by the government, she said, is needed to determine which of these agreements are due to expire and which are operating illegally.

“Those illegally operating should be reverted immediately because it’s illegal. There are many areas with abandoned fish ponds, and there are laws that mandate the government to revert them back to mangrove forests,” she said.

Primavera urged the government to be cautious in implementing a massive mangrove reforestation program, adding planting the right species is key to its success.

“Those areas hit by Yolanda, the native species that grew naturally were destroyed but they recovered fast.

The species that were planted in the wrong areas were washed away,” she said.

<http://www.businessmirror.com.ph/expert-urges-government-to-plant-mangroves-in-abandoned-fish-ponds-in-coastal-areas/>