

'Bamboo to save Laguna bay shed'

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CALAMBA CITY—The government has laid out an elaborate plan to cover one million hectares of watershed, riverbanks and lake shores with 200 million seedlings of high and commercially productive variety of bamboo in the next five years.

At the launch here of the bamboo development plan for the Southern Tagalog region on Wednesday, Environment Undersecretary Demetrio Ignacio said the massive planting of high-quality variety bamboo is a component of the social justice thrust of the Duterte administration, meant to benefit rural communities while preserving and rehabilitating freshwater sources and lakes.

“Planting bamboo will mean social justice, for it will benefit the people and the communities. In six years, we will plant in one million hectares,” Ignacio told a crowd of local officials, regional and provincial officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and representatives of other government agencies, people’s organizations and environmental groups in Barangay Looc.

The riverbank barangay of the city, the birthplace of national hero Jose Rizal, is among the selected pilot areas for the massive bamboo planting program designed to cover nearly 2,000 hectares in Calabarzon area with concentration in the communities surrounding Laguna Lake.

The lake, commonly called Laguna Bay, is the largest freshwater lake in the country and second in Asia. Numerous plans are afoot to protect, preserve and rehabilitate it following decades of human abuse resulting to its massive pollution and degradation threatening a major livelihood source for residents in large parts of Rizal, Laguna and Metro Manila.

The bamboo planting program is actually an element of the Laguna Lake rehabilitation plan under the DENR’s Sustainable Integrated Area Development program, an integrated approach to the reforestation and rehabilitation of the country’s watershed areas.

“This project will be a convergence of inter agency efforts in partnership with NGOs, civic groups and people’s organizations that will deliver results and benefit the people,” SIAD project manager for Region 4-A Herminigildo Jocson said.

At an initial cost of P30 million, Jocson said the communities will realize revenues of up to P230 million as he lined up a menu of benefits that will be drawn from the bamboo planting project.

In the same occasion, DENR regional director Arsenio Tanchuling called on local government leaders to stand behind the project, stressing their important role in ensuring not only the success of the bamboo planting program but more so the rehabilitation of the lifeblood of the Laguna Lake region.

“We know how important the bamboo is to our soil and the environment. And we know how this will help us save our lake,” Tanchuling said.

Responding for the LGUs, Laguna Gov. Ramil Hernandez committed to undertake measures in full support of SIAD and the lake rehabilitation plan.

In a message read for him by provincial administrator Dulce Rebanal, Hernandez said: “We are thankful for the inclusion of Laguna as one of the priority areas for sustainable integrated area development strategy and the focus on the Laguna Lake rehabilitation.”

“We are cooperating by taking into consideration the advice of the DENR in aligning our activities in relation to the rehabilitation of the lake, the river basins and the watersheds within the province,” he added.

On display during the event were bamboo products delicately designed and handcrafted by musician Ariel Penafiel, a native of Magdalena town in Laguna.