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# Mining sector's environmental 'trade off' to help PH recover

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by [Madelaine Mirafior](#)

The environmental 'trade off' of the highly destructive mining sector could help the Philippine economy recover during the COVID-19 pandemic, a top official from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) said.

MGB Director Wilfredo Moncano said in an interview with state-run Philippines Information Agency (PIA) that he hopes the public will gain an understanding as to how the mining sector truly operates.

During the interview, he admitted that the sector has adverse effects but he also said there are programs that help in mitigating and reducing the environmental impact brought by the sector's operations.

He then ensured the trade off of mining operations will certainly help with the recovery of the country.

Moving forward, Moncano said the mining sector is currently looking into several projects which would certify the generation of employment and revenues to the government.

But this was disputed by an environmental advocate, who said the contribution of the mining sector in the Philippines' has been dismal over the past years.

Green Thumb Coalition (GTC) Convenor and Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) National Coordinator Jaybee Garganera said he is disappointed with the "misplaced trust" of Moncano on the mining industry's contribution to economic growth.

"Historically, mining has never contributed significantly to GDP [gross domestic product], to employment, investments or tax revenues. There is no indication that trend will change in the near future," Garganera said.

At present, the mining industry contributes only 0.85 percent to the country's total GDP.

This is despite the fact the country's mineral resources has an estimated value of around \$1.4 trillion.

Garganera said it is a "twisted notion" to believe and rely on the trade offs between mining and the recovery of the country when the pandemic is "clearly linked to climate change and deforestation and mining is one of the leading causes of deforestation and climate change."

Last year, MGB embarked on a massive information campaign where it had spent millions to promote responsible mining in the country.

Such move is in stark contrast to how things were at the agency back in 2017 when it would rather spend its budget running after mining companies through multiple, overlapping audits led by late and former Environment Secretary Regina Paz Lopez. (See: [Gov't now spending millions to promote responsible mining](#))

Lopez, a known anti-mining advocate, almost shut down half of the country's nickel operators, including the major ones, during her term.

The other day, Finance Assistant Secretary Maria Teresa Habitan said she believes that the immediate lifting of Executive Order (EO) 79, which is the moratorium on new mining projects imposed during the time of former President Benigno Aquino 3rd, can help the Philippine economy recover from the pandemic-triggered recession.

Rocky Dimaculangan, vice president for corporate communications at the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP), an organization of some of the country's largest mining operations, agreed with her, but he also thinks that the government should just forego the conditions of EO 79 that no new mineral agreements shall be approved until a new tax regime in mining is passed.

According to him, the mining sector is already paying too much tax, referring to the decision of the Senate to include in the package one of Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) an increase in the excise tax rate for minerals from 2 percent to 4 percent.

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