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Boost national greening program to produce jobs, preserve biodiversity — Recto

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by [Vanne Elaine Terrazola](#)

Senate President Pro Tempore Ralph Recto on Friday proposed to the government to use the national greening project (NGP) as part of its COVID-19 recovery efforts to produce jobs for displaced Filipinos.



Senate Ralph Recto (Senate of the Philippines / MANILA BULLETIN)

Recto said the pitch could also avoid the P5.1-billion proposed 2021 budget for the NGP from wastage and delays.

“This is one program, which, like a sapling, should not be hidden under the canopy of tall trees. At a time when pandemic-hit people at the ground are looking for income, this can be part of the government livelihood menu,” the Senate leader said in a statement.

He said he supports “tree planting, as it is a climate change resiliency measure, while at the same time providing jobs and preserving our natural biodiversity.”

Recto said the government could mainstream the NGP to mobilize “plantreertos and plantreetas” in coordination with local government units that are “willing to provide financial or ‘sweat’ equity.”

The NGP was appropriated with a budget of P3.15 billion for this year. An increased budget of P5.15 billion was proposed for the program for 2021.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said the amount will be used to produce 72.9 million seedlings for planting on 82,349 hectares of new forest plantations and in existing ones.

Recto estimated that a total of P42.1 billion has been allotted to the NGP since 2011 to 2020. The agency ended 2019 having planted 1.807 billion trees in 2.141 million hectares of land over a period of 10 years.

“On paper, it is impressive because two million hectares of land reforested represents 1 in 15 hectares of the land in this country. Two million hectares is 32 times Metro Manila’s land area,” he said.

Still he asked the DENR to show proof of its achievements: “Instead of counting the trees planted, it must show us the forests. To invite people to sit under the shade of the hundreds of millions of trees it had planted. This is the ‘proof of life’ the people deserve to see.”

During the Senate hearing on the DENR’s proposed P25.5-billion 2021 budget, senators questioned the proposed increase in the NGP budget. Sen. Imee Marcos maintained that the country’s forest cover is still diminishing.

DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu said the Philippines’ forest cover is the lowest in Asia at 23 percent.

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