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Newtech Pulp, Lake Lanao abaca planters forge partnership via DENR program

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3 MINUTE READ

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has linked forest communities in Lake Lanao with abaca exporter Newtech Pulp Inc. for the supply of abaca.

The move brings hope of sustained livelihood to forest communities while conserving Mindanao's important watershed that is also the largest hydroelectric source in Mindanao.

Three people's organizations (POs)—Sunrise Producer Association, WAto Balindong Farmers' Cooperative and Sania Farmers Association—are now partners of Newtech Pulp in the supply of abaca fiber. Newtech Pulp has an abaca pulp manufacturing plant in Maria Cristina Balo, Lanao del Norte.

These POs operate in Piagapo, Balindong, and Maguing all in the Province of Lanao del Sur.

Newtech Pulp is sourcing abaca fiber from an estimated 200 hectares of abaca plantation that are under DENR's Integrated Natural Resources and Environmental Management Project (INREMP).

"These people's organization used to harvest rice and other crops like abaca, and banana just once a year. Their production in abaca is being sustained because they are now supplying directly to Newtech Pulp Inc.," Samsodin Taha, operations manager at INREMP's Lake Lanao River Basin (LLRB), said in a statement.

The LLRB within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao is the largest lake in Mindanao. It is also known to be one of 15 ancient lakes of the world.

Lake Lanao's hydroelectric facilities provide 65 percent of Mindanao's power demand.

INREMP has integrated a Maranao Ethnic Development Plan in its natural resources program in LLRB. The Maranaos have kept their own culture in keeping with the environment as stewards of nature.

However, due to poverty, some residents have resorted to illegal resource extraction and conversion of forests into farm lands.

To address the challenges, the DENR has carried out extensive natural resource management or NRM in LLRB.

As of the end-May, NRM includes a reforestation area of 145 hectares and an agroforestry area of 1,300 hectares.

Commercial tree plantation (CTP) covers 527 hectares while conservation farming covers 110 hectares.

Forest trees planted under CTP include falcata and mahogany. For conservation farming, fruit trees, such as durian, rambutan, lanzones are planted, together with cash crops and root crops.

Agroforestry areas are planted with rice, corn, banana, and palapa or white dallion (a root crop used as appetizer) and fruit trees and forest trees. Reforestation areas are planted with narra and lauan.

The NRM at Lake Lanao has a total budget of P78 million.

DENR is looking at partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform (MAFAR-LDS), Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy (MENRE-LDS), and the Department of Agriculture (DA) for the future expansion of the abaca plantation.

If these three agencies will infuse investment into the abaca project, the LLRB abaca area may be expanded, Taha said.

INREMP covers rehabilitation of six subwatersheds in LLRB. These are the subwatersheds of Marawi-Saguiaran, Ragain, Malaig, West, Taraka, and Gata.

It is jointly funded by the Asian Development Bank and the Philippine government.

INREMP's livelihood enhancement includes provision of turmeric processing machine for the Mapantao-Saguiaran People's Organization and its mini warehouse.

A solar drying pavement has also been put up for Dimapatoy Farmers Association while an abaca stripping machine has been provided for the Harith Tree Planting Farmers Association.

There are six rural infrastructure projects in the LLRB site and 29 Livelihood Enhancement Support projects. Beneficiaries are a total of 41 people's organizations involved in NRM. It has a total budget of P97 million.

An ADB project profile indicated that the rural infrastructure projects include access roads, farm-to-market access facilities, and potable water supply.

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