

DENR backs Canada-PHL nature-based solutions deal

Roderick Abad, Business Mirror

THE Philippine government has partnered with its Canadian counterpart to push for natural ways to adapt to the changing climate patterns, whose adverse impact has been felt with constant high temperatures and extreme heat index records in many parts of the country for several weeks now.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga keynoted the Philippine Canadian Partnership on Nature-based Solutions for Climate Adaptation (PCP4NbS) Program launch at the Makati Diamond Residences on Thursday.

The event was led by Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines David Hartman and Forest Foundation Philippines (FFP) Chairperson Edwina Garchitorea, and the rest of the FFP Board of Trustees.

According to the DENR chief, this partnership beefs up the strength of the Filipino—especially rural and indigenous women—against the effects of the interconnected crisis due to impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, the degradation and diminishing of green and blue forests, pollution, conflict and the cascading repercussions these may have on the nation’s resilience and sustainability.

“We must recognize that for a climate-vulnerable country like the Philippines, while mitigation has been strategic, building capacity for adaptation has been and continues to be both critical and urgent. This is especially important when we consider our ecosystems and the services they deliver as the lifeblood of our communities and the support they give to different sectors in our economy,” she said.

Loyzaga noted that gender-based susceptibility is compounded by intersectionality, as marginalization and multiple social and physical problems exacerbate the climate risk. She explained: “When gender intersects, conflict, ethnicity, age, literacy, poverty and disability, vulnerability to the impacts of extreme weather and other hazards deepens thus the importance of this particular initiative.”

The National Adaptation Plan

SEEING the importance of defining the scope and magnitude of the country’s climate action, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) had formulated and completed the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) aimed at mitigating vulnerability to the effects of climate change by building the adaptive capacity and resilience of communities.

The Philippine government presented the NAP during the 28th Conference of Parties of the UN FCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in late 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Citing the NAP, the DENR secretary bared that inaction on adaptation within the 2030 decade is estimated to cost around P1.4 trillion.

“Nature-based solutions are critical to our arsenal and must be rooted in the best available science as well as indigenous and local knowledge. Scaling up is part of the thematic areas that we address in the NAP, and this particular project is well within those areas,” Loyzaga said.

“We look towards protecting and rehabilitating biodiversity, critical habitats and ecosystems amidst the climate hazards that they face and the climate vulnerability of communities,” she added.

Facing this challenge, Loyzaga said they have taken a whole-of-government approach in crafting the new evidence-informed plans on adaptation while shifting towards building new non-traditional whole-of-society approaches to solutions that consider those who truly are willing to work with the Marcos Jr. administration.

“There is no natural constituency for climate resilience. We need to build it. And that building must be done out of trust and respect between all stakeholders across all sectors,” she pointed out.

To institutionalize NbS, the DENR, she said, has started to craft the national policies for this in the hope that Filipinos will support this effort.

Bilateral agreements

IN 2024, Canada and the Philippines will mark 75 years of their strong bilateral relations. Since 1986, the former has contributed over \$1 billion in official development assistance to the latter, averaging \$24 million annually in the last five years (all projects combined).

The PCP4NbS Program forms part of the \$28.15-million investment pledge of Canada in development programming for the Philippines, underscoring support for climate adaptation, resilience against natural disasters, and enhanced health care services, per a news release of Global Affairs Canada last February.

FFP will implement an \$8-million project in support of vulnerable communities as they reduce the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss. This initiative will aid in funding and capacity building to support gender-responsive, nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

“Our development and bilateral partners have also played an important role in biodiversity conservation, climate action and the fight against plastic pollution. We wish to cite here that we are deeply grateful to the Government of Canada for its generous support through the projects funded by the GEF or the Global Environment Facility and for its development assistance to the Philippines which spans many decades,” Loyzaga said.

She said the DENR remains dauntless with “honest, respectful and evidence-informed partnerships like these,” thus allowing the agency to know where to begin and what must be done to protect its so-called vast office that is the 30 million hectares of land, 15 million hectares of classified forests, over 7 million hectares of Protected Areas, 36,000 kilometers of coastline and 2.2 (million) square kilometers of territorial seas.

“We therefore look forward to working with FFP, its partners and the Government of Canada on PCP4NbS. We are targeting three wins: biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, gender equality and the resilience of communities in the context of natural resource management,” Loyzaga said.