

DENR budget, manpower not enough to save environment

THE head of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Thursday said the agency lacks the budget and manpower needed to mitigate the impact of climate change and boost environmental protection efforts across the country.

“Unfortunately, the way we are set up is that the fiscal space is very tight... The DENR is in charge of 15 million hectares of classified forest lands. We are also in charge of so many thousands of hectares of coastal areas,” Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Y. Loyzaga said in a press conference during the Mindanao leg of the DENR’s 2023 multi-stakeholder forum in Cagayan de Oro City.

“We cannot, at the level of budget at this point and the human resources available, do an adequate job of protecting all of our ecosystems,” she said in mixed English and Filipino.

“The reality is that there is inadequate resources to finance what are the impacts already known to the Philippines in terms of climate change,” she added.

The DENR has a budget of P23.29 billion this year, based on the 2023 General Appropriations Act signed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on Dec. 16. The department’s 2023 budget is lower than the P25.4 billion allocated in 2022.

Nonetheless, Ms. Loyzaga said she is banking on collaboration with the private sector, civic groups, and international partners to address the myriad and persistent issues relating to environmental protection and the climate crisis.

“It is a combination of legislation, some budgeting innovation in terms of the government and bringing in the different stakeholders to do their share in working with us in terms of the preservation, conservation, restoration, and regeneration,” Ms. Loyzaga said.

BALANCE

During the forum, Ateneo de Davao University President Joel E. Tabora underscored the

role of the DENR in balancing environmental protection with economic development through resource management.

“The DENR cannot just be a government agency to exploit the natural resources of the Philippines in favor of the economy and of the private interests that drive this. The DENR must be the protector of the environment,” said Mr. Tabora, who lamented the seeming failure of government to listen to the public’s voice.

“They should make sure that society and the planet are not killed by the vicious technocratic paradigm driving the economy. They must be guided by voices of people on the ground, in local government units or in the regions,” he added.

Miguel A. Dominguez, Alsons Aquaculture Corp. director, urged the National Government to boost efforts in promoting food self-sufficiency and to evaluate coastal resources to further develop the local aquaculture industry.

“We must stop relying on imports. There has to be co-management between the local governments and the community themselves. The government must get out of their silos and start looking at these resources to encourage more self-sufficiency and food production that would enable the Filipino to have better food security,” Mr. Dominguez said.

Ian Valentin U. Sermonia, Siargao Tourist Operators Association president, pressed the DENR to beef up its waste management awareness campaigns and promote ecotourism for a more sustainable industry.

“Increase in tourism also means an increase in waste,” said Mr. Sermonia.

Ms. Loyzaga said the DENR is bent on adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to the sector’s concerns.

“We at the DENR firmly believe that addressing issues pertaining to the environment and our country’s natural resources needs a comprehensive approach and multi-stakeholder partnerships for evidence-informed, inclusive, and adaptive leadership,” she added.

The Mindanao forum follows similar multi-stakeholder discussions held in Luzon and the Visayas.