

DENR vows shift to climate resiliency action

By: Belle Cariaso | Manla Times

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THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) vowed to shift its efforts from the current disaster response and recovery to disaster prevention and building climate resiliency in the country's most vulnerable provinces.

During the 35th meeting of the Task Force Build Back Better (TFBBB), the DENR presented a new policy direction that would give focus on disaster prevention and climate-resiliency capacity building in provinces identified as most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

These provinces include Masbate, Sorsogon, Catanduanes, Apayao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, Ifugao, Negros Oriental, Western Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Southern Leyte, Siquijor, Sarangani, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Dinagat Islands, Zamboanga del Norte, Bukidnon, North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, Sulu and Lanao del Sur.

"One aspect of the gains that the task force can look into is on how we can shift our mode from response and recovery to putting in place governance frameworks that will prevent climate-related disasters and climate resiliency in these identified provinces," DENR Undersecretary for Finance, Information Systems and Climate Change Analiza Rebuelta-Teh, who also serves as the TFBBB Secretariat head, said.

Rebuelta-Teh explained that the direction was pursuant to the blueprint of action set out by Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, which focuses on strengthening climate risk capacities through improved coherence and implementation of climate-resiliency and adaptive programs under the whole-of-society approach.

Also discussed in the meeting was the harmonization of TFBBB's role in relation to the functions of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) as the lead implementor of Republic Act 10121, or the "Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010," through the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) of the Department of National Defense.

Rebuelta-Teh likewise emphasized TFBBB will take part in the drafting of the 2023-2028 Philippine Development Plan, specifically Chapter 17 or Accelerate Climate Action, and Strengthen Disaster Resilience of the document that will lay out specific actions on climate and disaster resiliency.

"The DENR is in charge of Chapter 17. We will interface with the OCD in the development of this chapter so that we can craft more specific and concrete plans, rather than motherhood and generic directions," Rebuelta-Teh added.

TFBBB was created by Executive Order 120 issued on Nov. 18, 2020 by then-president Rodrigo Duterte to expedite and lead the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of post-disaster rehabilitation and recovery programs for typhoon-ravaged areas.

TFBBB's focus areas include the Cagayan River Basin, Marikina River Basin and the Bicol River Basin that were damaged by Typhoons "Rolly" and "Ulysses" in 2020, as well as Region 6 (Western Visayas), Region 7 (Central Visayas), Region 8 (Eastern Visayas), Region 10 (Northern Mindanao), Caraga and Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) that were ravaged by Typhoon "Odette" in 2021.

TFBBB oversaw the widening of the Cagayan River to address floodings in the province, clearing a total of 515,441 cubic meters (m³) from a big sandbar in Magapit Narrows, exceeding its target of 344,304.51 m³. Another 142,220.7 m³ were dredged from a huge sandbar constricting the river in Barangay Dummun in Gattaran town.

Some 119,340 bamboo planting materials through TFBBB's initiatives were planted covering 585 hectares along the stretch of Cagayan River to stabilize its riverbanks.

Marikina River chokepoints consisting of 67,425 m³ were likewise removed, resulting in the river's improved water flow at 3 meters per second (mps) from 2.3 mps before the dredging operations in February 2021. Its current flow rate is now close to its ideal flow rate of 4 mps.