

JICA leads turnover of access road, banana plantation project in Ifugao

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The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) graced the turnover of an access road and a banana plantation and development enterprise project in Brgy. Montabiong, Lagawe in Ifugao Province showing significant gains in its funded Forestland Management Project (FMP).

Actual site monitoring activities by JICA to its funded projects such as the Forestland Management Project (FMP) was constrained by the Covid-19 pandemic for two years. After a long wait, JICA resumed its project site visits starting in the Ifugao, Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) on June 13.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has led the project implementation of FMP.

The access road plays an important role in the socio-economic progress of the town as it leads to the center of Brgy. Montabiong. It also serves as a farm-to-market road.

Beneficiary and partner of the banana enterprise and road are peoples organizations (POs) of the Lagawe subwatershed.

JICA also had an inspection of the Subproject Site Management Office (SUSIMO) of the Lagawe subwatershed and Provincial Project Management Office (PPMO) of FMP Ifugao.

The main purpose of the three-day site visit is for JICA to witness first hand project gains at the field level to further support the decision of the funding agency in granting the request for project extension of an additional year or until July 2023.

Consequently, DENR's Foreign Assisted and Special Projects Service (FASPS) led by its new director, Al Orolfo, made sure its technical assistance to the activity to affirm its support to the project in the region.

The turnover ceremony of the Rehabilitation of the Montabiong access road was further graced by the Embassy of Japan contingents led by its First Secretary, Tachikawa Junpei.

Part of the ceremony's key message of JICA representative, Hashizume Takuya, is urging "LGU officials and partner POs to take care and maintain the 4.5 km infrastructure in order to ensure longer utilization of the subproject" and achieve "improved access to our critical subwatershed in order to sustain reforestation, conservation, and protection efforts."

Further, Engr. Ralph Pablo, the regional executive director of DENR-CAR, reminded the community people of Montabiong to "strike a balance" between socio-economic and watershed rehabilitation and conservation activities as in the end humanity cannot survive a heavily degraded environment with the emphasis that "there is no planet B."

The subsequent activities focused on visiting the PO office and tree and agroforestry plantations of the Greener Pasture Ad Holnad, Inc. (GPAHI), specifically beholding how agroforestry farm-to-table tablea

are made possible by the organization through its cacao plantations all the way to its established enterprise development cacao processing facility.

The Boliwong Organization of Muyung Protectors, Inc. (BOMPI) on the other hand, showcased to the honored guests the PO's fruit trees intercropped with bananas which are both bearing fruits at this stage.

Inspection of project offices and interviews with project staff gave JICA a glimpse on how day-to-day operations are made by the DENR to pursue project activities albeit now in a more fast-paced manner in view of tight project implementation timeline. From these, issues and concerns were discussed and recommendations by the site visit team were formulated to overcome them.

Undoubtedly, the lessons learned gained from the visit such as PO field practices on project

implementation, their networking and linkaging efforts and most of all their enduring visions for their communities and the environment highlighted the event. Takuya, as part of his

concluding field impressions, cannot help but convey his congratulations for the exemplified humble but growing successes of the project in the region.

Pablo is pleased that CAR has been selected as JICA's post pandemic pilot area for its project site visits which is also in time for FMP's 10th year of implementation.

With the naturally long-term nature of forestry projects and with the promising results seen on the ground, the region hopes to have provide appropriate impetus for the funding agency, JICA, to affirm the request for project extension soon.