

# **Project to help Samar communities**

By Eireene Jairee Gomez

A DEPARTMENT of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) project to build socioeconomic resilience in the Catubig Watershed will protect the Samar Protected Landscape and Seascape while supporting the livelihood of rice farmers, craftsmen and fishers.

The Small Grants Program (SGP) Phase 7, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), was launched by DENR just last month.

It involves livelihood and biodiversity projects in four sites. These are in Aurora province (Sierra Madre), Calamianes Group of Islands in Palawan, and Siargao Protected Landscape and Seascape in Surigao del Norte.

Phase 7 sustains the project that was started under GEF-Phase 5.

The DENR-GEF SGP-7's work in Catubig Watershed may have the biggest environmental and socioeconomic growth impact among Samar natives.

While known to have a rich biodiversity profile with mixed dipterocarp forests, Samar Island is also known as the most cyclone-prone region in the country.

The National Economic and Development Authority reported in 2015 that Northern Samar, where the Catubig Watershed is located, had a poverty incidence of 61.6 percent. This makes it one of the country's poorest provinces.

The SGP-7 costs \$13.78 million of which \$4.436 million comes from a GEF grant. The Philippine government co-finances \$9.214 million.

"It is urgent that we strengthen the resilience of our community-based organizations. They are the frontliners in conservation and livelihood interventions. In this period of climate change and biodiversity degradation, a more integrated effort of interventions is essential," Environment Secretary Jim Sampulna said.

Greg Sarmiento, executive director of the Eastern Visayas Partnership for Rural Development, said the launch of SGP-7 is timely due to recent climate hazards experienced in the province.

The Samar Island Natural Park is the second-largest natural park in the Philippines covering 335,107 hectares (ha). It has the country's largest contiguous tract of old-growth forest.

The Catubig Watershed is a major source of water supply in the household. The newly completed dam whose water comes from Catubig Watershed irrigates some 8,000 ha of rice farm.

"Catastrophic incidents like the onslaught of Typhoon 'Odette' highlight the urgent need to continue our efforts on disaster risk reduction and resilience building," said Dr. Selva Ramachandran, UNDP Philippines resident representative.

"These devastating events exacerbate the already limiting and unpredictable situation brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. The promising changes being offered by SGP-7 are expected to effect change toward strengthening governance systems even for disaster response, recovery and building resilient communities."

SGP-7 has a livelihood component. The project encourages natives to engage in biodiversity friendly enterprises in order to help veer them away from illegal logging and fishing activities.