

Sibol project to boost environment protection, economy in rural areas

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

A P1.1-billion project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has elevated the Philippines' appreciation for natural resources and biodiversity protection and is seen to boost environmental protection and support economic activity in rural areas.

Called Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes (Sibol) and implemented by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the project estimates the economic value of the country's natural resources and has trained Filipino natural resource managers on how to properly account for environment-provided benefits.

A five-year natural resources management and biodiversity conservation project, Sibol is among the biggest and most important initiatives in the country that could profoundly impact the environment in generations to come, according to USAID.

Launched in 2020, Sibol aims to work with the government to achieve its goals of improving natural resource governance, stimulating public and private sector investments, and reducing environmental crime.

Through the project, a total of 275 government staff and researchers from Philippine public universities have completed a three-month training that will support the government's promotion of economic growth through the conservation of the country's ecosystems.

The training serves as a foundation for incorporating environmental valuation into the design of economic plans at the local level.

The Philippines' capability to quantify the economic value of its natural resources will be applied in natural capital accounting.

"When we have competent natural resource managers who are able to account for and monitor the economic value of ecosystem services, the country is in a better position to understand the drivers behind natural resource depletion," said John Edgar, USAID Philippines Environment Office director, in a statement.

"It's a necessary intervention that will preserve the country's biodiversity, oceans, and landscapes," Edgar said.

Natural resource managers and researchers from the DENR, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, National Economic and Development Authority, Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, and six

public universities learned various methods for measuring the value of benefits derived from the environment, such as food, water and fuel, soil conservation, and coastal protection.

“This [capability will help in] updating the country’s asset accounts, or the value of resources found in Philippine forests, coral reefs, and fisheries,” the DENR said.

According to the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the Philippines is one of 17 megadiverse countries in the world, which account for 70 percent of the entire planet’s species of flora and fauna.

The project is hoped to promote greater ecosystem stability and inclusive green growth.

Sibol has set up four sites in the following key protected areas in the Philippines, namely 1) Masinloc-Oyon Bay Protected Landscape and Seascape, a coastal area that supports thousands of fishers and coastal communities threatened by mining, overfishing, and population growth; 2) Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park and Cleopatra’s Needle Forest Reserve, which are forest areas of the ecologically important Palawan province and significant habitats for biodiversity; 3) Mantalingahan Protected Landscape, a forest area that is home to abundant biodiversity and more than 12,000 indigenous people threatened by logging and mining pressures; and 4) Siargao Bay Protected Landscape and Seascape, a marine protected area surrounded by the country’s largest contiguous mangrove area and is threatened by over-fishing and the exploitation of other natural resources.