

## PROFEM, A PROJECT EVALUATION

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### Introduction

The Philippines is one of the developing countries that have to rely heavily on its forest resources to sustain and propel its economic development. This is due to several reasons, among which are the following:

1. The country is still in its early stage of Agro-Industrial Development. Its capacity to produce industrial goods is still at its infancy, hence, it must rely heavily on agricultural activities to support its governmental operations and sustain its rapidly increasing population. Among its readily available resources are the timber and other forest products which are ranked among the highest in international market, hence, their demand is high.

2. The country being mountainous has to maintain about 47% of its land area under constant forest cover in order to protect the soil from being eroded by the torrential rain, mitigate the adverse effects of flash floods that cause loss of lives and property, and at the same time maintain the scenic beauty and environmental quality, and offset the rapidly deteriorating ecological balance.

3. The rapid destruction of the forest came about during the last three decades starting immediately at the end of the second world war and continuously progressed until about 1976. One of the probable causes of this destruction is that our timber enjoyed high prices offered by the raw material-hungry countries like Japan, Taiwan, United States, and Europe, so much that the exploitation of the forest was given the focus of attention, forgetting all the while the restoration of the removed vegetation. The forest industry during these times garnered a top position among the magic 10 dollar earners of the country, second only

to the perennial topnotcher which used to be sugar.

As consequences, these rapid and rapacious logging and lumbering practices have left behind some 14 million hectares of barren mountain sides about half of which are situated on critical watersheds. These are areas that catch rain water for the generation of hydro-electric power, provide for the constant irrigation of farmlands, and control the occurrences of floods.

To reforest this 14 million hectares of barren land, it is estimated that it would cost the government 28 billion pesos and about half a century of continuous labor. As the situation appears, the country seems hopeless, and in the losing end in its battle to regain and restore the wealth of its mountain sides.

### **Background Information**

In its desire to remedy these conditions, the government has adopted some solutions, at least to lessen the adverse effects of deforestation with the following remedial measures:

1. Massive reforestation work in some selected areas of the country. Having been a separate government entity from 1961 to 1976, the Reforestation Administration<sup>1</sup> has identified and started to reforest some 3 million hectares of critical areas. It established, developed and maintained 60 reforestation projects all over the country. However, the progress of this activity was constantly reversed by periodic burning of plantation areas which may be caused by nature itself or purposely done by some misguided elements. Reforestation therefore proved to be a very helpless "David" in the presence of a "Goliath" of forest destruction.

2. The governmental policy requiring logging concessionaires to practice selective logging proved to be a sorry failure like the reforestation attempt. Selective logging specifies, among other things, the selection of trees to be cut, removing them carefully so that the other trees that are left behind must not be damaged and that these remaining trees should be allowed to grow to re-stock the area. The government must see to it that this condition is complied with. However, many of the loggers, due to insufficient logging equipment, and their desire to cut as many trees as economically possible, have violated this condition. There

was heavy forest destruction and whatever trees remained were cut down and burned by land-hungry kaingineros and speculators.

3. The newly enforced Presidential Decree granting ownership to cultural minorities over the so-called ancestral lands which are mostly located in forested areas have compounded the problem of forest conservation ten times over. Because of the newly acquired rights and privileges of the members of the cultural minority, forest destruction continued at a faster rate in the desire of these members of this cultural minority to earn money. They are selling the timber to the highest bidder or entering into logging partnerships with timber operators on royalty basis.

Since the land is considered to be theirs by virtue of succession, they felt free to dispose with it, with inviolable rights, without governmental interferences and control.

It was during this period of chaos and confusion when the First Lady of the country, Gov. Imelda R. Marcos, visited communist China. During that trip, she learned of the massive reforestation work going on in that country being done by the citizens, free of charge, as a part of their governmental service. Knowing of the forest predicaments in the Philippines, Gov. Marcos, upon her return to the country, included this observation as one of the highlights of her report to the President.

In pursuance of the recommendations of the First Lady, the president issued Letter of Instructions No. 404, dated May 19, 1977 designating the Secretaries of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Public Highways, Education and Culture, Local Governments and Community Development, and National Defense, each with specific duties and responsibilities to promote activities in "pursuance of the beautification, environmental development, and anti-pollution program of the government" through tree planting campaigns all over the country.

The embodying mandate of the tree planting activities came out on June 6, 1977. Contained under the Presidential Decree No. 1153, this legal instrument enforces the "planting of one tree every month for five years by every ablebodied citizen of the Philippines." Among others, it spelled out the proposed areas to be planted, the mode and manner of planting and the accompanying penalties for non-compliance thereof.

Close at the heels of PD 1153, is the issuance of another letter of instruction which serves as guide in the implementation of PD 1153. Letter of Instructions No. 423, together with PROFEM Administrative Order No. 1, has specifically spelled out the procedures to be followed in the program. It added to the membership, as cited in LOI No. 404, the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, Secretary of Public Information, Commissioner of the Budget, Chairman of the National Science Development Board, and the Chairman of the Human Settlements Commission. By and large, the program appears to have been well considered.

### **Planning**

The planting activities are to be done in the following places, according to the order of priorities as follows:

*Priority 1* - Open areas within watersheds that support or are intended to support infrastructure facilities such as irrigation, hydroelectric dams, and water reservoirs;

*Priority 2* - Open areas within public alienable or disposable lands, public forests and pasture lands;

*Priority 3* - Privately owned lands that are open and lying idle;

*Priority 4* - Parks, school grounds, civil, and military reservations, roadsides, and communal forests;

*Priority 5* - Family residential lots and backyards; and

*Priority 6* - Areas other than the above.

The preparation of the planting plans (maps) as well as schedules of planting is made by the smallest unit or the organization, the barangay, thence passed through channels on the way up, until it is integrated into a national plan. Likewise, the preparation of planting materials, with the exception of the initial years (1976), are to be shouldered on the grassroot levels. In other words, planning, which is the most important phase of the operations is on low level and may tend to be very diversified—extremely unified, and badly fragmented.

### **Organizational & Structural Aspects**

Viewing the organizational setup from the top, it will be noted that the endeavor is extremely top-heavy. It had tapped no less than

twelve major national agencies with diversified orientations as participants. Likewise, the funds to be used by these respective agencies are to be derived from *their own savings* to be cleared through the President's office and the Budget Commission for such purposes.

With the hierarchical setup following no organizational order, i.e., only the Executive Officer as the operating member with all the others as mere cooperators, the organization seems to be doomed right from the beginning. Only the executive officer would be active in initiating and planning the operational existence and survival of the program while the others would only assume the passive roles of waiting for whatever program is formulated and implement same with half a heart, if ever the program is implemented at all.

As cited earlier, the structural pattern of the organization is very informal and quite fluid. The top governing body is the Presidential Council for Forest Ecosystem Management (PROFEM) which governs the national performance of the organization. This is supported on the regional levels by the Regional Councils (RECOFEM) which are composed of the regional directors of the departments and/or ministries that are participants in the top governing body: Provincial PROFEMS headed by the provincial governor on the provincial level; Municipal PROFEMS headed by the municipal mayor on the municipal levels; and the Barangay PROFEMS, headed by the Barangay Captains.

Schools, civic organizations, the military, as well as the youth organizations are expected to help out in the implementation of the program. The Bureau of Forest Development and the Bureau of Plant Industry are assigned to provide the seedlings for the activities. *Theirs are just supporting roles.*

### Implementation

The Department of Local Government and Community Development is assigned to coordinate the activities of this program at all levels. It must pool the combined efforts and resources of the participating agencies together into one common and unified front to spearhead the tree planting program, as envisioned.

On the other hand, school administrators are expected to lead the teachers and students along this line. To obtain and delimit the areas to

be planted, they must coordinate with the town/city mayors for possible planting sites, while the military organizations are supposed to reforest their camps and military reservations.

### Evaluation of the Program

Actually, an evaluation is out of place because *there is no program to evaluate, or substantial results to measure*. Reports on activities and results are still uncompiled; the directions of planting activities strike on all degrees of a sailor's compass. While there appears to be a quasi-organization, it is so loosely assembled, and composed of so many members that it would practically render it weak and definitely quixotic to manage.

The implementation phase of the program fell on the lap of the DLGCD which does not have sufficient knowledge nor expertise in this particular project. If, at all, it can perform its functions, this would be in the form of coaxing the members to attend meetings and draw out some ideas on activities to be pursued.

Its members, at all levels, from the national down to the barangay have their own particular functions to discharge, goals and targets to achieve, and must prioritize their organizations' efforts and funds to these ends before they could even look at the PROFEM activities. For them PROFEM is just secondary, an added burden, a poor "second priority."

The identification of priority areas to reforest is indeed good, but very impractical. Watersheds are located in very remote areas, almost inaccessible and quite dangerous for lowlanders to reach "just to plant one seedling per month." This being so, then school children would not be permitted by their parents to go there to plant trees. Because of this, citizens who may wish to comply with the provisions of this presidential decree would plant in the most accessible area, for convenience, which is most likely to be within the town proper. The end-result of this activity, if we follow this kind of thinking, would be *bald mountains, and jungle cities*.

There is a growing resentment among people towards the decree and possibly towards its implementors. Firstly, it is of common knowledge that the idea is a borrowed one—from Communist China at that—

and people are suspicious of the motives behind it. They begin to suspect that the country is turning Communist. Secondly, it is widely known that forest destruction, and all its attendant evil effects, came about through indiscriminate logging by a few concessionaires who turned millionaires overnight. They question: "Why not make them repair and reforest the mountainsides?" "Why make the *common tao* pay for the blunders of others?"

### Recommendations

A. *Reorganize PROFEM*: As pointed out earlier in this paper, there are so many participating members of the program. Many of these are "excess baggages" and irrelevant insofar as the functional operations of the program are concerned. They would only cause delay, discouragement, and problems to the organization. Their presence would render the organization difficult to manage. Meetings would be difficult to convene, for lack of quorum.

It is expected, with reasonable assurance that the program would prosper faster, and bear better results if it were limited to the "planting organizations" namely: the Bureau of Forest Development, which must be assigned to the reforestation of the mountains with timber and other economic trees, and the Bureau of Plant Industry, to take care of the lowland to be planted to fruit, shade, and flowering trees. This would simplify management and operation, avoid confusion, pinpoint responsibilities, foster economy, and bring about faster and better results.

B. *Revise the Operational Instructions*: "The planting of trees by every able-bodied Filipino citizen" ... etc. as provided for in the decree looks good on paper, but impractical in real life. As pointed out in the priorities of areas to be reforested, bare watersheds and critical mountainsides are the causes of problem where solutions should be applied. The cure to the illness should be made to strike directly at the very root of the problem. This is sound management.

The remedy to this problem would require able-bodied men, grown-up males, to do the job. Children and women can be assigned to do some tree planting for beautification, fruit tree raising and shade tree propagation in the lowlands, along roads, highways, parks, and plazas, if it is

the desire of the government to involve them in this activity. They should not be required to climb the hills to do their tree planting duties. This is inhuman.

The program should be amended such that there shall be a representative for each family or household to do the tree planting. With census data as basis, it would be easy to determine how many trees a household or family should plant at a given time. The family should choose its representative to do the tree planting for all the members. Should there be no able-bodied member who can do the job, the family could hire one who can represent it.

The Bureau of Forest Development should schedule the sending of these representatives up to the watershed area, provide them with seedlings and arrange with the military for protection.

Each representative may stay in the planting area for as long as may be necessary to fill up the quota for the family or household he represents. Certifications can be issued on the spot upon completion of the planting requirement.

This recommendation envisions not only economy in its implementation, not only orderliness and efficiency in management but also better results. The trees get planted in areas where they should really be, for production, and protection purposes, but more importantly, they are assured of better survival and growth because they are planted properly.

*C. Intensify Tree Planting Extension Work:* By its very nature, the presidential decree assumes the stance or stature that orders. It commands. It demands obedience and compliance, or else ... and here comes the litany of penalties and punishments.

By its very nature, impositions like these instill in people the feeling of resentments. People hate to be ordered, or to be commanded, much more so to be "pushed around." Human nature is such that it hates to be dominated. While this appears to be a universal truth, it is also a proven fact that these same people would readily come to the fore and give their utmost if they are involved in the planning and decision making. Properly explained and enlightened, they would cooperate in any national endeavor, especially if the undertaking is closely identified to their common welfare.

It is in this field where the mass media must come in. The implementing organizations must use all of the means and materials available to bring its message across to the people. In this aspect the Ministry of Information, through the radio and press, could play a very important supporting role.

D. *Other Participants:* There are two important national organizations that stand to benefit from the successful results of the PROFEM. These are the National Power Corporation, and the National Irrigation Authority. Both of them use water; the former for hydroelectric generation, while the latter for the irrigation of farmlands.

Fortunately, these are income generating units too. They earn money through the sale of their services to the consuming public. To help assure the success of the PROFEM activities, they could channel some of their incomes to finance the projects, especially in the protection and improvement of the vegetations that are established on the watershed.

This can solve the problem caused by slashing some amount from the budgets of the participating agencies, and more importantly, fixed amounts to finance the project can be ascertained.

Upon completion of the recommended steps, which are, reorganization of the structure, amendment of the procedures, application of massive extension that stand to benefit from its success, this program can be tried again for a reasonable time—say two years—then evaluated.

It is predicted that the results would spring some pleasant surprises.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Merged with the Bureau of Forest Development as per Presidential Decree No. 1.