

THE TACLOBAN DECLARATION

Typhoon Yolanda has shown the value of mangrove forests in saving lives and property during typhoons and storm surges. As a result, the national government has allocated one billion pesos to the DENR for a mangrove and beach forest development project. While intended for calamity-prone areas nationwide, the bulk of this amount will go to Eastern Visayas which bore the brunt of Typhoon Yolanda.

We welcome the government's allocation of PhP1 billion for the mangroves and beach forest initiative. This will go a long way in reestablishing coastal greenbelts that contribute to marine fisheries and serve as protective barriers against storm surges. However, we also express our apprehension that this reforestation program may do more harm to mangrove recovery efforts, especially since we need healthy mangrove stands in light of extreme weather events and sea level rise due to climate change.

Understandably, immediate post-Yolanda assessments of mangrove stands give the impression that mangroves were totally destroyed. However, we have to realize though that natural processes do take time.

In January and March 2014, on-site assessments were done by a multi-sectoral team of scientists from UP-Diliman, UP-Tacloban, Ateneo de Manila University, and De La Salle University, staff from DENR Region 8, and 3 international and 3 local NGOs involved in mangrove conservation. Their study focused on mangrove areas in 6 municipalities in Eastern Samar, and 5 municipalities and 2 cities in Leyte.

Their assessments proved that nature always finds a way – most mangrove stands in the 14 locations showed only minimal to partial damage. As for trees that were completely defoliated, leaves began to appear on their branches and trunks only a full 2½ to 4½ months after Yolanda hit. New mangrove seedlings are actually coming out of the ground in most of the assessed areas, showing promising potential for full recovery.

This is not a new phenomenon. Mangroves affected by natural calamities regenerate naturally without human intervention. This was experienced in the coastal towns of Isabela province that were affected by Typhoons Iliang (1998), Harurot (2003), and Juan (2010). Non-intervention has also been documented to be effective in rehabilitating mangroves affected by man-made disasters such as the Guimaras Oil Spill.

If not done properly, the reforestation program may involve “clearing” operations that kill viable trees mistakenly perceived to be dead, and trampling of seedlings that could contribute to new generations of mangroves. If the existing viable mangroves are cleared and new mangrove seedlings replanted, they will need about 6-10 years to grow to maturity; whereas recovering mangrove trees and seedlings/saplings already present will take only 3-5 years to fully regenerate, if properly protected. Improper clearing operations may cause greater damage in terms of lives and property as what could have developed into storm barriers are removed in order to plant new mangroves which will take years to develop. Where reforestation will be conducted, it should be ensured that only dead mangroves will be cleared. Any mangrove

rehabilitation activities should be based on scientific assessments rather than on compliance with required project deliverables.

We have already seen how viable mangroves have been cleared in one municipality, in order to plant new ones. In other sites, not only were the wrong species planted (which could lead to poor survival rates based on past projects), the mangrove planting sites were even extended to cover seagrass beds.

We support government's efforts in restoring our mangroves as a long-term investment in climate change adaptation. We call on the government to ensure the following:

- 1) Mangrove reforestation and rehabilitation programs in any area should be conducted only after proper assessments are undertaken by multi-sectoral teams, with the participation of the academe, civil society, and local governments. This will ensure that the money allocated is spent for replanting in areas where the mangroves are actually destroyed, rather than in areas where mangroves are recovering.
- 2) In areas where there are degraded mangroves, there is need for enrichment planting of nursery-raised seedlings of appropriate species. Degraded areas include those where mangroves were cut (for firewood, charcoal) or cleared for fishponds. Illegal, abandoned, underutilized and undeveloped fishponds should be reverted to mangrove forests. No new mangrove areas should be opened for fishpond development.
- 3) Do not plant mangroves in areas where there are seagrass beds and coral reefs, and in areas that were never naturally vegetated with mangroves.
- 4) Establish where appropriate 100-meter coastal protection greenbelts composed of a combination of mangrove and beach forests. The identification and development of these greenbelts should be considered part of the CLUP/FLUPs, DRRM and other planning mechanisms of local governments.
- 5) Implement cash-for-work programs for coastal protection specifically mangrove protection and the reestablishment of beach forests using indigenous tree species.
- 6) Implement cash-for-work programs for establishing community-based nurseries of indigenous species for beach and mangrove reforestation efforts.
- 7) No-build zone policies should be based on both science and law. The rights of fisherfolk and other displaced communities should be protected. Any resettlement sites should take into primary consideration their access to traditional livelihoods and culture. Resettlement sites should be gender-safe and child-friendly. Funding for fisherfolk settlements and relocation of other communities from high-risk areas should be allocated immediately.
- 8) Enact the National Land Use Act and the National Coastal Greenbelt Bill.

The one billion pesos for this reforestation and rehabilitation project come from our taxes. We want this program's measure of success to be based on proper implementation, rather than just quantifiable deliverables. This will take a multi-sectoral approach, from the national government, local governments, the academe, non-government and people's organizations, and local communities. We are here at the forefront of extreme weather events.

PLEASE HEAR OUR VOICES.

Signed this 14th day of May 2014 at the UPV Tacloban College by the participants of the *Mapping Yolanda's Impacts on Philippine Mangroves II: Workshop for National Government Agencies, LGUs, NGOs and POs*.

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