

ARE OUR FORESTS READY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE?

Climate change and forests are strongly interconnected. This connection has already been established through scientific research and evidence. Forests reduce greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂), which makes them critical in climate change mitigation. Conversely, climate change threatens the forests' health, which affects their ability to perform essential functions or provide environmental services.

PHILIPPINE POLICIES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

The Philippines has not failed to put necessary policies, programs, and structures to respond to the challenges of climate change. The Philippines is vulnerable to climate change, thus local policies address the country's adaptation and mitigation goals, as well as the indirect impacts of climate change, such as poverty. These policies follow a multi-sectoral approach that complements the international agreements committed by the Philippines.

One of the most important environmental policies of the country is the **Climate Change Act (RA 9729)**, which brought about the **National Framework Strategy on Climate Change (NFSCC)**.

Section 8.5 of the NFSCC acknowledges that there are "several gaps in governance, extension services, research and development, capacity building, and financing among others, in the forestry sector." The **Philippine National REDD-Plus Strategy (PNRPS)** was adopted to address these gaps.



PILOTING REDD+ IN THE PHILIPPINES

REDD+ refers to "policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries." It is a set of voluntary approaches (i.e. country-initiated, nationally-determined approaches, but guided by UNFCCC rules), where a country can gain incentives for reducing CO₂ emissions from the forestry sector.

REDD+ is seen as a national approach, driven by the country's specific needs to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and the need for forest conservation and enhancement. It also entails nationwide accounting, reporting, and verification of forest emissions and/or sequestrations before accessing the incentives offered under the mechanism. Its pace is dictated by the following:

How fast (or slow) a country can prepare in terms of policies, action plans, and capacity building

How soon these can be implemented

When these will be measured, reported, and verified



Following this phased-approach, a number of projects were implemented to serve as demonstration site for REDD+ in the Philippines. The success of these pilot projects was attributed to:



Sustained political and technical support (e.g. capacity building)



Active participation of stakeholders, particularly the peoples' organizations and/or the indigenous peoples in all aspects of the project



The passage of policies and pieces of legislation



Established institutional and funding mechanisms

THE FUTURE OF REDD+ IN THE PHILIPPINES

Recommendations include:



Establishing specific regulations expounding on available laws to prevent the common pitfalls of implementation, such as overlapping rules and redundant methods.



Designating focal persons or groups in national agencies and in the local front (e.g. environmental resource officers), to facilitate faster policy implementation.



Conducting technical research, which are crucial in quantifying carbon incentives brought about by REDD+.

Additionally, the need for sustainable financing for REDD+ initiatives cannot be overemphasized. The initial success of REDD+ pilot site implementation and the establishment of necessary enabling activities were primarily donor-driven. However, most of these donor-led support projects have or will end soon, and no major follow-up financing support is expected in the short-term. The lack or delay of support from investments from the UNFCCC negotiations further exacerbates this issue. Furthermore, the current REDD+ pilot sites need to be replicated, and this also requires funding. Lessons learned from pilot sites indicate there are two parallel financial tracks that may be pursued:

- ▶ Financing of activities, with the ultimate goal of getting carbon incentives under the REDD+.
- ▶ Financing of non-carbon benefits that may or may not be directly related to addressing climate change, but provide benefits to the community.

In summary, **more work must be done to mainstream REDD+ policies that are based on local experiences.** There's also a need to **build capacity for both technical and social aspects of implementation**, and lastly, **sustainable financing is required** to foster REDD+ initiatives.



Much work has been done on REDD-plus in the Philippines, but more needs to be accomplished.