

CSR, Envi partner to establish Bamboo Plantation Program



It may not be long before pockets of the humble and willowy bamboo form part of the greeneries on select areas surrounding the plant facilities of Roxas Holdings, Inc. (RHI).

In an email interview with Stakeholder Relations and Corporate Communications (SRCC), RHI Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Head Angeline Bondad envisions bamboos to abound in all three plants in Negros Occidental and possibly, in Batangas as well, in the coming years.

“In the future, we hope to see bamboo greeneries on select areas surrounding the plant facilities, serving as natural mitigation measures – windbreaker to help abate odor and prevent soil erosion in some critical areas like lagoon or river embankment, among others,” Ms Bondad said.

Last June 6 to 7, Ms Bondad, together with Environment Manager Roselle Recreo, rolled out a Bamboo Training Workshop in La Carlota City, Negros Occidental.

Twenty-nine participants from RHI subsidiaries and partner government agencies attended the training, which is part of the Bamboo Plantation Establishment Program that will be implemented in select areas of Central Azucarera de la Carlota, Inc. (CACI), Roxol Bioenergy Corporation (RBC) and San Carlos Bioenergy, Inc. (SCBI).



Also known as the “Grass of Hope” and the “Poor Man’s Lumber”, the bamboo proffers surprising economic and environmental benefits. As such, the CSR and Envi teams expect this form of grass to help in alleviating environmental concerns at the Plants while helping nearby communities through livelihood projects.

“From the CSR perspective, through this project, we hope to engage with key partners from the national [level] down to our LGUs, including our communities, and be able to show/share the environmental as well as potential economic benefits that can be derived from this giant grass, bamboo. It’s also an initiative to show that we care and work towards the protection of our environment,” Ms Bondad said.

The bamboo plantation, according to the CSR Head, “will serve as an additional environmental measure that can help in odor control – bamboo serves as a very good windbreaker; and erosion control for which bamboo is known to be good for”.

However, she noted that the bamboo program is just an additional measure for environmental management. “The Plants still need to maintain current mitigation measures as well as pursue plans of putting up engineering measures to further address such concerns on odor and solid/liquid waste management.”

Bamboo’s promising benefits also encompass the economic aspect.

“Yes, the Bamboo Program will also bring opportunities for the communities. Initially, we are looking at them as our potential partner for the supply of bamboo propagules –

if they could establish their own plant nursery, then, we could source out the bamboo propagules from them,” explained the CSR Head.

She encouraged others to consider bamboo plantation as a serious endeavor. “In the future, they could also consider bamboo growing as a potential source of income considering the many livelihood that can be developed using bamboo as raw materials,” Ms Bondad said, adding that the environment team carried out the identification of the areas where bamboo can be planted.

Over time, the bamboo may also be used as feedstock.

“Bamboo can be considered as a potential source of biomass feedstock, but we do not have any financial or cost benefit analysis as to the financial viability of this,” Ms Bondad shared.

Aside from being considered as feedstock, bamboos are also known as soil stabilizer.

One of the advocates that provide technical guidance and assistance to the team is the Provincial Economic and Development Investment Center (PEDIC). The center assisted RHI’s CSR and Environment teams in identifying viable bamboo species to be planted per identified site.

“Among the varieties identified by PEDIC are *Kawayang Tinik*, Chinese Bamboo, *Bagacay* and Giant Bamboo,” she said.

Ms Bondad shared that the team is considering Tabun-ak, a variety of bamboo, for trial as a natural filtration.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (DENR-ERDB), through the Coastal Resources and Ecotourism Research, Development and Extension Center (CRERDEC) Cebu Office headed by Dr. Alicia L. Lustica, conducted the workshop on Bamboo Propagation and Management.



On the first day of training, Roxol AVP/Factory Operations Head Noli G. Segovia encouraged participants to make the most out of the two-day workshop which followed the benchmarking conducted last February 21 in an area called Bayawan.

Dr. Lustica talked on the bamboo industry in the Philippines, the various species of bamboo and its uses, how to establish a bamboo nursery as well as the points to consider in planting bamboo during the workshop last June 6.

The participants spent the second day, June 7, at the field where they were asked to apply their gained knowledge on the establishment of bamboo plantation such as propagation using the culm cutting method, considered the most commonly used and ideal process for bamboo varieties that produce roots easily.



In a workshop summary prepared by CACI CSR Officer Geraldine P. Lulu, it was noted that the bamboo varieties that are ideal for culm cutting include *Kawayang Tinik*, *Kawayan Kiling*, *Laak* and *Anos*.

“Generally, suitable bamboo culms for propagation are collected from vigorous and healthy one- to two-year-old mother clumps which possess well-developed, healthy and undisturbed fresh branching buds,” Ms Lulu wrote in the workshop summary.

There is also the one-node culm cutting method where a node is cut from a mother culm with upper internode longer than the lower portion, and cut open to serve as water receptacle during propagation in the nursery or in the field.

Aside from cutting culms, the participants were also briefed about Hormex Root Stimulator as they dipped their cuttings in a solution for half hour before they transferred their bamboo propagules to 32 pots filled with garden soil, mud press, animal manure and vermicompost. Hormex, according to Ms Bondad, is “a rooting hormone that helps or accelerates and improves rooting and stem growth”.

Some of the attendees to the workshop were from the Department of Education.

“The schools have expressed willingness in terms of nursery establishment and participation in the establishment of bamboo plantation. The school heads and DepEd Superintendent, particularly of San Carlos City, said that this is aligned with the program of DepEd,” Ms Bondad shared.

The CSR team conducted the training and involved everyone to get the program started instead of first putting up a nursery and spending for manpower.

“We have not looked into the actual number, but meeting the manpower requirement to handle and care for a nursery (especially in Negros where we do not maintain one) will be difficult at this time,” the CSR Head shared, adding that it takes about 10 to 12 months from the establishment of a nursery to actual transplant.

With the completion of the training phase in Negros, the team may replicate the session at Central Azucarera Don Pedro, Inc. (CADPI) in Batangas.

“Yes, there are discussions with the Envi team to have a Bamboo Project in Batangas. Though, we have yet to decide if there is a need to run the training. CADPI has its own plant nursery,” she said.

With optimism over this project, our dream of seeing bamboo greeneries at the Plants may come earlier than expected.