

# A Centuref Project

By  
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From atop the old church tower of the Catholic Church in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, I surveyed one late afternoon with great concern the treeless mountains of this *provincia*. Our records show that there are 81,300 hectares of open land in our district. Our nurseries can only plant an average of 500 hectares a year which is rather a very slow rate of rehabilitating our lost forest. I came then to think deep of a way by which we could speed up the birth of trees. The first thought that came to my mind was to lay down a plan of attack and submit the same to the Director of Forestry for approval. So with my notebook and a five-inch long pencil I started scribbling all random ideas in my mind. I opened my discussion with a short prayer for good guidance and in this prayer I even wished I could have the power of creation. Would it not be wonderful and miraculous indeed if by just saying "let there be forest" a stand of Molave and Narra trees would soon greet the blowing wind with a "Hello". But then wishing alone won't work as Don William Shakespeare said, "If to do (wish) were as easy as to know, chapels would have been churches and poor man's cottages, palaces." So I forgot all about the supernatural power and engaged myself in more realistic ideas.

What was the cause of our open land? Our books say due to the Kaingineros, principally. Is it really? Well nobody ever contradicted that, not even the kaingineros themselves. Our first project, therefore, is to stop kaingin making. The trouble is, who will take the responsibility of enforcing the cease firing or cease cutting order of the Director? "I will" said Mr. Ranger, "but I can not promise

concrete results". We know that much. Mr. Ranger though how much he tried he could hardly budge an inch of improvement. How about Mr. Forest Guard? Well he seems powerless inspite of his authority under Section 1818 of the Revised Administrative Code as amended by Act No. 3809 and also he seems already accustomed to seeing "infiernos" on the slopes and tops of our mountains. It is really hard to stop kaingin making. Just imagine, we have been at war with the kaingineros since 1863! If I am not mistaken, no peace treaty has ever been signed yet for lack of liason officers. We are out numbered all the time, remember? Much more, the kaingineros are also wise. You cannot just register their thumb marks and if they did, they are like the Reds of North Korea. They will sign all right. They will have a truce with you and would promise to respect every tree in the mountains but that is only on paper. They will violate all terms agreed upon. Of course they look so repentant and vow not to kaingin again, to make the occasion memorable, they will even invite you for a "basi" or "tuba" drinking spree. You, who always think that drinking is a reliable PR, mix it up with them with a toast of "long live the forest"! We leave them with the hope that they stop building bonfires only to find out later after a surprise visit that these kaingineros who had promised in the name of heaven are again running amok in the forest. The remedy therefore is to multiply the number of forest officers to run after these vandals of the forest. Again, multiplying is not an easy business. The products of the College of Forestry are not enough to answer the lack of personnel of the Bureau of

Forestry. You ask me why. Well, let us be honest. You see, "Many are called but few are chosen", sayeth the Lord. Same truism holds in the College of Forestry. Many had registered but only a few remained. Now here comes another, "why?" Yes, why? Your answer is as good as mine. There are so many common reasons of the students, past and present, valid or otherwise. For the sake of reciting them again, let me put them on record. The College of Forestry, being a state institution, (imagine U.P.) and maybe because of its high location, has a high standard of grading and everything. Just think of this, *Ha* 75% is our 38th parallel line. If you cannot cross that border you are likely to be under the Red (ten times underlined) rolls. You are given of course the chance to dye your grade with blue, but suppose you cannot? Then God bless you! You know, some say our fieldwork in Los Baños is very hard. Indeed it sometimes is. But what of it! Aren't we born to labor? Weren't we given two hands to work, a mind to think, a tongue to talk, two eyes to see and to feet to walk, run and climb with. Individual differences I suppose. This is especially true to those who are used to walk on a fairly level paved road. Then we have this introduction to trees and palms and woods which are all snobbish. You say, "Hi!" to them. They will not even answer you. It takes time before you can register their names and to learn them by heart is another difficulty for some one had baptized them in Latin. It's harder than learning the *kyrie eleyson*. In general, we got to accept that there are lots of difficulties which make life in College more interesting and memorable. Modesty aside, I pushed through, hardly though. My formula was this, "If others can pass, why can't I". You can add to this something like this, "If one will pass, I will pass". This phrase had been my propeller and it carried me to the last ditch of my battle ground. A good advice is to take it easy always. Do not worry. Just work and find pleasure in your work no matter how hard."

Now let us go back to our problem. Since we could not as yet deploy forestry made

men in the field, I mean sufficient number to counterattack the kaingineros, let us resort to some body else. We have the Municipal Mayors and Barrio Lieutenants to turn to. To minimize kaingin-making, if not stop it altogether, we should seek their cooperation to please discipline their subjects. Barrio lieutenants could be deputized as deputy forest guards or barrio forest guards without or with compensation. But if Mr. General Fund could afford it, let us give them something for their cigarettes. Papers of deputization should if possible be in linen paper to be framed with the picture of the lieutenant. In this manner we could elevate his ego. Then let us not also forget the kainginero. For every convert kainginero, let us give a medal. It need not necessarily be a valuable one. Then once a kainginless area is attained, we can go on with our Centuref Project. By the way, "Centuref" is a marriage between the word *Century* and *Reforestation*. In full we can call it "Century Reforestation Project", abbreviated as C.R.P. not C.P.R. please.

Our task now is to establish a reforestation project for every barrio all over the country. How can we make the people move and acclaim that this project is a *manna* from Heaven? I have the following to offer:

First, we have the so called Tree Farm Lease. Let us feed the people with all information about this farm lease. Benefits derived from it should not be left undiscussed. We need to have a wise and friendly persuasion so we could win their hearts. In this project, barrio lieutenants should first call a meeting to find out whether the people would be willing to apply as a whole under this lease. If willing, then a corporation could be formed. The title may be either, "Calima Community Tree Farm Lease", or "Community Tree Farm Lease", or "Barrio Calima Tree Farm Lease" or Hacienda de Barrio Calima. Rentals may be on the basis of percentage of the gross income to free the poor people from paying when the trees are not yet bearing fruits. Fruit trees for planting may either be one of these species: coffee, cacao, coconut, camito, mango etc., or a combination or

one or two or a mixture of all. Care should be given in the selection of plants. Soil should be examined first. Preferably landscaping should be done first before planting. It is easy to move trees in the map than on the ground I should like to add in this connection that Community Development Officers could render a big help in this project. In the Training Center for PACD here in Ilocos Norte, every effort has been exerted to make these officers realize the importance of reforestation. They pledged (hope not a kainginero pledge) to bring to the rural folks the urgent need of reforestation in which the people could do their share via the Tree Farm Lease.

Second, we have the woodland lease. This differs from the Tree Farm Lease in that this is solely for the planting of forest trees not fruit trees, plus, of course, free of rentals. The same process could be followed as in Tree Farm Lease. Species such as Ipil-ipil, Benguet Pine, Mahogany, Narra, Para-rubber, Santol, Bitao, etc. are ideal for planting. Ipil-ipil plantation can answer the acute shortage of firewood for the flue-curing barns of the tobacco provinces as well as for charcoal and for household consumption. The leaves were found good feeds for animals and the seeds could be used for adulterating coffee. Benguet Pine finds profitable market during Christmas season. Para-rubber can answer the demand of our shoe and tire factories. Santol will find a place in the wooden shoes or bakya industry and even reach as far as the altar on account of the "saint makers". Bitao for our wood carving and furniture industries. And let us also hope that the seeds of Bitao could be sweetened by the Forest Products Laboratory.

Ipil-ipil Project is discussed elaborately in the article of the Director of Forestry published in the Forestry Leaves dated July, 1955, entitled "Ipil-ipil — Firewood Crop Prospectus".

Let me single out Benguet Pine Plantation. All conditions being favorable, ten hectares of Benguet Pine Plantation can easily yield also a lot of money. Let us say, four hundred seedlings are planted in one hectare, that

is, at 3 meters apart. At the age of from 4-5 years, the plants are already ready for the market. Tagging each plant from ₱3.00 to ₱5.00, in one hectare one can get from ₱1,200 to ₱2,000, clear cutting. The cost of planting per hectare of Benguet Pine potted seedlings is ₱11.00. Of course the cost of planting stock, transportation, harvesting and supervision has to be considered also. This can be safely placed at ₱500.00 per hectare. Simple arithmetic will give you a net income of from ₱700.00 to ₱1,500.00. Surely money can grow on trees!

Third, I have in mind the Bureau of Education. This bureau can do a double job, first by injecting into the minds of the students the value of trees and second by making them implement these teachings into action. If only all barrio schools would have a project of one to two hectares each, then it will not take a thousand years to reforest our cogonlands that need reforestation. In Ilocos Norte, for example, the Governor initiated a province wide seed collection by requiring each pupil to submit one chupa of ipil-ipil seeds at the end of the school year. The result was very heart-warming. At the end of the drive there were sacks and sacks of ipil-ipil seeds collected. This goes to show that even the school children with the proper guidance can help in bringing back our lost forests.

Last, I believe some of the Congressmen need to be invited to a "Gripe Session" ceremony especially those who are fond of slashing the appropriation for our bureau, particularly the funds for reforestation. Then it would be high time for the parties concerned to follow the Spanish saying of "El que no chilla, no mama" (No milk for the non-howling baby). It would be high time then for them to make a "howling success" of the occasion.

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*Truth is not a crystal one can put in one's bag, but an infinite fluid into which one falls headlong.*

— Robert Musil