

Strengthening Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) in the Philippines: Adoption of the Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan

BACKGROUND

The Philippines has long recognized the critical role of forests in sustaining biodiversity, supporting rural livelihoods, and mitigating climate change. However, decades of deforestation, land degradation, and competing land-use pressures have significantly reduced forest cover and weakened ecosystem resilience.

The country's forestlands face persistent challenges, including illegal logging, forest conversion, tenure insecurity, and limited institutional coordination. At the same time, climate change has intensified risks such as typhoons, flooding, landslides, and droughts—placing additional stress on already fragile forest ecosystems and forest-dependent communities.

To address these challenges, the Philippine government has institutionalized Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) as the national strategy for sustainable forest management since 1995 through the issuance of Executive Order No. 263. CBFM empowers local communities, particularly People's Organizations (POs), to manage, protect, and utilize forest resources sustainably.

In October 2025, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) adopted the Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan through DENR Memorandum Circular No. 2025-06. This marks a significant policy shift toward a more integrated, climate-responsive, and community-driven forestry governance framework.

Key Messages

1. The Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan reinforces community stewardship as the cornerstone of sustainable forest management in the Philippines.
2. The strategy strengthens institutional coordination by aligning national, regional, and local planning processes under a unified CBFM roadmap and regional action plans.
3. By integrating climate resilience, livelihood development, and multi-stakeholder participation, the plan advances both ecological sustainability and socio-economic development.



Figure 1: CBFM Area of Macatumbalen Community-Based Forest and Coastal Management Association (MCBFCMA), in San Vicente, Palawan, Philippines
Source: DENR-FMB, 2025

COUNTRY TREND HIGHLIGHT

A Strategic Shift toward Integrated and Climate-Responsive Forestry

The adoption of the Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan provides a comprehensive roadmap for advancing community-based forestry across the Philippines. It builds upon existing legal frameworks while addressing emerging environmental and socio-economic challenges. It envisions “empowered and resilient communities and support groups/institutions in sustainable and equitable management of forest ecosystems” with five (5) major strategies: community development planning; capacity development; livelihoods and enterprise development; climate-resilient forest rehabilitation, protection, conservation and management; and mechanisms towards a sustainable and institutionalized CBFM Program.

CBFM Strategic Plan Implementation Pathway

1. Institutional Strengthening and Governance Alignment

The Forest Management Bureau (FMB) is tasked with developing a national CBFM Roadmap that outlines a clear vision, targets, and implementation timelines over a ten-year period.

The DENR Regional Offices, in coordination with their field offices, are required to prepare corresponding Regional CBFM Action Plans, ensuring alignment with national priorities. This multi-level planning approach enhances policy coherence and reduces fragmentation across governance levels.

2. Mainstreaming CBFM into Local Development Frameworks

All DENR Field Offices are mandated to integrate CBFM targets into their plans and programs and facilitate integration with Local Government Units (LGUs), People’s Organizations, and other government agencies’ plans.

This mainstreaming ensures that forest management is embedded within broader development planning, including agriculture, rural development, and climate adaptation strategies.



Figure 2: CBFM Area of Pacific Development Cooperative (PDC) in Lianga, Surigao del Sur, Philippines
Source: DENR-FMB, 2024

3. Community Empowerment and Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

The Strategic Plan emphasizes the central role of CBFM People’s Organizations in forest management. It promotes stronger collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society, academe, and development partners.

By fostering inclusive participation, the plan enhances local ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability of forest management initiatives.

4. Climate-Resilient and Sustainable Forest Management

The Strategic Plan aligns with the Philippine Master Plan for Climate Resilient Forestry Development (2016–2028) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

It integrates climate adaptation and mitigation measures into forest management practices, including reforestation, agroforestry, and watershed protection, thereby strengthening ecosystem resilience and carbon sequestration.



Figure 3: Men and women of Baslay Highland Agriculture Cooperative (BASHACO) working on their nursery in their CBFM Area in Duin, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Source: BASHACO, 2025

Climate and Socio-Economic Benefits

The Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan is expected to deliver multiple benefits:

- Enhanced forest cover and ecosystem restoration, contributing to biodiversity conservation
- Improved climate resilience, particularly in vulnerable forest-dependent communities
- Sustainable livelihood opportunities, through agroforestry, forest-based enterprises, and value chain development
- Strengthened local governance, with empowered communities actively managing forest resources

By linking environmental sustainability with socio-economic development, the plan positions CBFM as a key driver of inclusive green growth.

Building Strong Partnerships and Governance

The success of the CBFM Strategic Plan depends on coordinated action across multiple stakeholders:

- DENR provides overall policy direction, technical guidance, and institutional oversight.
- Forest Management Bureau (FMB) leads roadmap development and supports regional implementation.
- Local Government Units (LGUs) integrate CBFM into local development plans.
- People's Organizations (POs) serve as partners and frontliners in sustainable forest management efforts in the upland and coastal areas.
- Development partners, academe, and civil society contribute technical expertise, capacity building, and resource mobilization.

This collaborative governance model ensures that forest management is both participatory and evidence-based.



Figure 4: The Officers of the National CBFM PO Federation meeting with the Director of National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) for partnership and collaboration
Source: CBFM Strategic Plan Documentation Report, 2023

At the core of the Strategic Plan is the recognition that sustainable forest management is only achievable through empowered and engaged communities.

The plan promotes:

- Capacity building for People's Organizations
- Secure tenure and resource access
- Inclusive participation of women, youth, and indigenous peoples
- Development of community-based enterprises

These measures aim to strengthen local stewardship while improving livelihoods and reducing poverty in forest-dependent areas.



Figure 5: The DENR-FMB staff understanding the needs and aspirations of the CBFM PO members of Maningcao United Farmers Association (MUFA) in Sibulan, Negros Oriental
Source: Gibe RC, 2024

A Pathway Toward National Resilience

The Ten-Year CBFM Strategic Plan represents a forward-looking approach to forestry in the Philippines. By integrating community participation, climate resilience, and institutional coordination, it provides a robust framework for addressing current and future environmental challenges.

Over the next decade, the plan is expected to:

- Restore degraded forestlands
- Enhance ecosystem services such as water regulation and soil stability
- Strengthen disaster risk reduction
- Contribute to national and global climate commitments

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges	Opportunities
Fragmentation of institutional roles across national and local levels: Despite multiple agencies being involved, coordination remains uneven, with overlapping mandates and differing policy interpretations leading to inefficiencies, delays, and weak accountability.	Strengthening multi-level governance through the CBFM National Working Group and local structures: Existing coordination platforms provide an opportunity to harmonize policies, improve inter-agency collaboration, and strengthen linkages between national, regional, and community levels for more coherent implementation.
Limited capacity and resources of CBFM People's Organizations (POs): While POs are central to CBFM, many face constraints in technical skills, organizational management, and access to finance. This limits their ability to effectively manage forest resources, develop enterprises, and respond to climate and market challenges.	Institutionalizing community-based approaches within national development frameworks: CBFM aligns strongly with broader priorities such as climate action, rural development, and biodiversity conservation. Embedding it into national and local frameworks can elevate its role as a core strategy for sustainable landscape management.
Inconsistent integration of CBFM into local development planning: Despite policy support, integration into LGU plans is uneven, with CBFM often remaining peripheral instead of fully embedded in land-use, agriculture, and climate strategies.	Strengthened partnerships and governance: Growing global support for climate action presents opportunities to access funding mechanisms such as REDD+, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), and donor-supported programs, enabling sustained investments in forest restoration and community livelihoods.
Long-term financing constraints for sustained implementation: CBFM initiatives often depend on short-term project funding, resulting in discontinuity. The lack of stable financing mechanisms such as dedicated budgets, credit access, or ecosystem-based financing hampers long-term sustainability and scaling.	Enhancing monitoring, evaluation, and accountability systems: Strengthening data systems, indicators, and participatory monitoring can improve transparency, support evidence-based decision-making, and enable adaptive management for more effective and responsive CBFM implementation.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of the Ten-Year Community-Based Forest Management Strategic Plan marks a significant milestone in the Philippines' forestry sector.

More than a policy directive, it represents a comprehensive framework that connects governance, community participation, and climate action into a unified strategy for sustainable forest management.

Its success will depend on sustained collaboration, adequate financing, and strong community engagement. If effectively implemented, the Strategic Plan has the potential to transform Philippine forest landscapes into resilient ecosystems that support

both environmental sustainability and inclusive development.

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Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)

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