

# CHALLENGES TO FOREST REFORESTATION



MASUNGI  
— GEORESERVE —



## LAND SPECULATION

Unoccupied forest land is a magnet for landless groups in the Philippine setting and through the free patent law, having a certain number of years land amounts to a legal claim for land ownership. This is further taken advantage of and heavily worsened by professional squatting syndicates who would obtain physical possession for huge tracks of land in order to acquire and sell it later on for free.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

One of the land cases the organisation has is against Tanchoco (Tanchoco versus Blue Star). The group is claiming possession for whopping ~113 hectares of land, and therefore ownership, over the area. While previously retaining an open structure of ~500 sqm in the vicinity, the group has never been on most of the land and rarely is in the area. This case is still unfortunately in court.

### REMEDIES

1. For impoverished communities typically unaware of the law, **education and signages**.
2. As encroachment happens along roads, **preventing or limiting construction**.
3. Where roads are necessary, **close monitoring and checkpoints**.
4. **Human presence by rangers**, though costly, is the best known deterrent.
5. Implement **check and balances with lower government agencies** to prevent connivance.

## QUARRYING

Quarrying is an extractive and intensive activity that creates an impact on the full landscape and all life on it. As such, where carried out, it must be done in places with the least environmental impact account for the full cost to the environment and communities during and long after, be done and monitored responsibly, and include an effective restoration of its own.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

There are rocks within and around Masungi Georeserve, illegal quarry operators are encountered in the restoration sites and the communities. Quarrying, when done incorrectly, severely destroys the landscape and affects the health and water sources of nearby communities causing sicknesses and a decreased quality of life. As with syndicates, quarrying often involves corruption as well as hiring of private armies.

### REMEDIES

1. Implementation of **land use policies**.
2. **Removal of overlaps** with key biodiversity and restoration sites.
3. **Regular monitoring**.
4. **Government checks and balances**.

## INTENSIVE SHIFTING AGRICULTURE

Displacement of farmers and conversion of agricultural land for other purposes forces farmers to move. Down the line, when farmers look for other areas for their crops, forest lands and reforestation sites are easiest to sacrifice. Alongside this, growing families, settlements, and populations near forests causes clearing for more production.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

We have observed how population densities quickly grow and impact land. Because of this, there are activities only allowed for certain zones. It has also been observed that in areas where intensive farming practices have been done (i.e. chemical application), the soil and native flora have a difficult time naturally regenerating. Restoration therefore becomes more difficult, time-intensive, and costly to conduct in these areas.

### REMEDIES

1. **Land-use planning and zones** where certain activities are prohibited and allowed must be done effectively and followed.
2. **Land conversions must be controlled**, monitored and checked back with the sustainability of the land and forests which ultimately sustain all life--including agriculture.



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## TREASURE HUNTING

Many Filipinos are still trying their luck on World War 2 & Yamashita treasures! It is seen as an easy way out of poverty. In the process, land is cleared and occupied, and trees are cut down.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

Treasure hunters, with reforestation stewardships as a front, were found and were brought to the police. While we maintain that it is impossible to hide treasures inside rocks, there are still several factions who take interest in the land as if there are treasures to be found inside.

### REMEDIES

1. **Education** about the truths of treasure hunting.
2. A **culture shift** away from easy-rich schemes.
3. **Alternative livelihood** is important.
4. **Laws against treasure hunting** must strictly be implemented.

## WILDFIRE

Human-caused by arson, cigarettes, power lines, equipment sparks. Naturally-caused by dry climate, lightning, volcanic eruptions. Moves very fast. Destroys years' worth of reforestation. Causes ash, reduction of organic material in land, increase in run-off flash floods.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

In the newly-pursued reforestation site, fires are caused by indiscriminate burning done to clear forest land for agriculture. This is often done prior to the arrival of the rainy season. In several other mountains in the vicinity, it has been observed that fires are done in order to clear areas as campaign grounds for the summer.

### REMEDIES

1. **Preventively banning** of fire-making materials and cigarettes.
2. Ground fires can also be controlled through continuous **maintenance, fire breaks, fire patrols, and having fire-fighting tools available during the dry season.**

## GRAZING

Livestock can be used to clear weed and grass during the early phases of restoration. Cows and the like cannot distinguish young trees from grass. These can annihilate forest regeneration efforts.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

It is true that we take patrolling of grazing goats, cows, and carabaos very seriously. In cases when they are found, they are gathered, tethered if still needed be, and returned.

### REMEDIES

1. **Removing livestock** altogether on the site.
2. **Use of fences** especially during early stage restoration.
3. Communities can also **tether livestock on the field** and gathering grass for the instead of allowing grazing.

## HUNTING

For good biodiversity, seed dispersing animals must feel safe. Hunting has a direct effect on the quality, efficiency, and diversity of restoration in the long run.

### MASUNGI GEORESERVE'S CASE

Birds are our flying little forest rangers when it comes to reforestation. Cloud rats, civet cats, and monkeys do the same. The presence of fig trees and fruiting trees serve to attract wildlife to stay with us and help in the tree planting.

### REMEDIES

1. **Hunting equipment may be banned** in sensitive and recovering areas.
2. As animals move, **educating communities** around reforestation sites and turning them into **forest stewards** is also important.