

# Smart Recycle PH rewards recycling with actual trees

By Edg Adrian A. Eva

SMART RECYCLE PH is supporting the country's reforestation efforts by planting trees in exchange for points earned through partners' recyclable waste contributions.

"This initiative helps keep recyclables away from landfills but, at the same time, contributes to reforestation efforts in the country," Noelle Anne Cubacub, communications manager at Smart Recycle PH, said in an interview.

Smart Recycle PH offers an app where partners can monitor their recycled waste contributions, earning Smart Recycle points that can be converted into real trees through the "Recycling for Trees" campaign.

For every kilo of lightweight materials, such as paper and plastics contributed, partners earn one Smart Recycle point, while five kilos of heavyweight materials, like metal, are required for one point. Every 100 points can then be converted into trees planted in designated areas covered by its ground partner, Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc.'s (RAFI) One to Tree program.

Companies and residential areas can contribute all types of recyclable wastes such as paper, plastics, cartons and metals. They can do this by availing themselves of Smart Recycle PH's waste collection services through the company's website or social media pages.

Recyclable waste can also be disposed of at local recycling drop-off centers, including those in SM City Cebu, H&M, and Globoe, all of which can also be found on the company's website.

Through this campaign, the company has planted more than 2,500 *guyabano* seedlings in the village of Luca, Balamban in Cebu, in partnership with the Luca Farmers Multi-Purpose Association and RAFI-One to Tree.

As it enters its third year, the Recycling for Trees campaign seeks to expand its impact by

seeking to plant 1,500 mangrove trees at the RAFI-One to Tree sites in Batangas.

Although the initiative operates through a reward system, Ms. Cubacub told *BusinessWorld* she hopes more companies would join them to protect the environment, rather than simply focusing on vested gains.

"We want to encourage our current and future partners... to focus on collective reforestation efforts," she said. "We want to work together for larger environmental goals rather than competing for individual recognition."

Since its rebranding in 2021, Smart Recycle PH has seen a growing number of companies adopting sustainable waste management practices, recognizing the need to adapt to rising consumer environmental awareness.

"It's closely linked to the long-term viability of their brands or companies. They invest more in sustainable practices so they can be better positioned to thrive in the future," Ms. Cubacub said.

The company now has 35 partners across the waste value chain, including major corporations in business districts and residential areas, most notably in Cebu City and Manila. This expansion has increased its nationwide presence from just 20 partners.

Since 2021, the company has diverted around 883,946 kilos of waste that could have gone to landfills.

Ms. Cubacub said there is still much work to be done.

For plastic waste alone, the Philippines has a low recycling rate of 9%, according to a 2020 report by the World Wildlife Fund. Each Filipino consumes an average of 20 kilos of plastics annually, 15.43 kilos per capita of which become waste.

Ms. Cubacub cited the need for companies to take steps toward sustainable waste management, while encouraging communities and households to cut their waste.



APRAN DOUGLAS-UNSP/ASH

# PHL startup fights 'period poverty' using bamboo

FEMININE CARE startup Hiraya Pilipina created zero-plastic sanitary pads from bamboo to help fight menstrual period poverty and stigma in the Philippines.

Aside from helping girls, Dream bamboo pads are made of 100% natural material to reduce waste, Cleorine Faith C. Loque, founder and chief executive officer of Hiraya Pilipina, told *BusinessWorld*.

The startup has partnered with We Bleed Red Movement Philippines, a nongovernmental group, to reach out to Filipinas who need menstrual care products.

Ms. Loque said 1% of their profits from the sanitary pads are donated to women in need, especially victims of calamities.

Period poverty — lack of access to menstrual products, education, and hygiene facilities is a pressing Philippine issue, Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said at a United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York in March.

She said period poverty is a global community health concern that affects women and girls physically, emotionally, and academically.

"Period poverty is something that we need to address urgently, even as we address other issues such as financial literacy and financial inclusion of women," she said, according to a statement from the Budget department.

In July, Hiraya Pilipina donated 500 boxes of compostable pads to victims of Typhoon Gae-mi, locally known as Super Typhoon Carina, through We Bleed Red Movement.

"With initiatives from this NGO and Hiraya Pilipina, hopefully, we're able to open more conversations around menstruation so we can educate more young girls regarding their periods as well," Ms. Loque said.

She noted that unlike commercially available feminine pads with toxic chemicals that cause itchiness and irritation, their bamboo pads are composed of plastic-free materials such as breathable bamboo surfaces from China and biodegradable wood pulp from Germany.

"The sourcing of materials is very intentional as well because we want

to ensure that it's of the highest quality and it's also really good for sensitive skin."

Compostable materials used in the biodegradable pads decompose after 180 days, unlike traditional pads, which take 600 to 800 years, she added. — **Almira Louise S. Martinez**



SVEN SCHLAGER-UNSP/ASH

## Digital payment, from SI/1

"In overcoming these barriers, the BSP has been proactive in providing the enabling policy and regulatory framework that supports the digitalization of priority payment risk cases most relevant to consumers, may they be individuals, businesses or the government."

"Some of this may not fall squarely within the BSP purview. Thus, strategic collaborations with stakeholders, both from the government and the private sectors, are being pursued," she added.

Ms. Masangkay noted the central bank's recent efforts to promote digital payments, such as pushing for PESONet, InstaPay, QR Ph and Bills Pay Ph to become the "preferred mode of payments" for Filipinos.

"Other payment streams in the pipeline will further support the person-to-business, business-to-business, and person-to-person segments," she added.

The BSP earlier announced it was developing new facilities to boost digital payments, such as the request to pay (RTP) facility and direct debit facility.

Last year, the bulk or 84.4% of retail payments made were from merchant and supplier payments, BSP data showed.

The central bank also seeks to enhance cross-border payments to "increase the business competitiveness of the Philippines' e-commerce, exports and international trade sector," Ms. Masangkay said.

In March 2023, the BSP and four other central banks in the region said they would connect their domestic instant payment systems through the Bank for International Settlements' Project Nexus.

"The BSP's efforts to promote digitalization of payments are strategically geared towards advancing financial



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inclusion by ensuring an efficient, safe, and secure digital payments ecosystem that supports the needs of our stakeholders while also increasing the number of Filipinos who have access to financial services," BSP Assistant Governor Zeno R. Abenoja said.

## BANKNOTES STILL NEEDED

Meanwhile, GlobalSource Partners said the Philippines still requires the use of banknotes despite the rapid shift to digital because it lacks the infrastructure to accommodate the transition.

GlobalSource country analysts Diwa C. Guinigundo and Wilhelmina C. Mañalac said the country's digital transition "still has a long road ahead."

"If some quarters believe that these trends could dislodge the use of banknotes in the Philippines... this may not be the case, just as yet," they said in a report.

"The reason is obvious. The Philippines continues to be challenged by the limited communication connectivity including the issues of internet coverage, speed and cost. There is a big deficit in physical infrastructure that is critical to online, digital payments and settlements."

It cited the BSP's recent announcement of collaborating with

German government banknote printer Bundesdruckerei GmbH to improve currency production and share knowledge on payment management.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. said there is still a need for banknotes even as more people shift to electronic payments.

Banknotes should also be made "more secure, more durable and even more sustainable," Mr. Remolona said.

GlobalSource said the partnership to future-proof banknotes showed that the "transition to a higher level of digitalization may still be a remote target, considering the challenges of weak connectivity and infrastructure backbone."

At the start of 2024, internet penetration in the Philippines stood at 73.6%, according to the "Digital 2024" report by DataReportal. This meant that 26.4% of the country's population remained offline at the beginning of the year.

"Between urban cities and rural areas, digital access could not be more stark. Fixed broadband speed averages only around 95 Mbps (megabits per second), so much lower than say, Singapore, where internet speed can be as fast as 291 Mbps," GlobalSource added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocsón**



(From L to R: Marc John M. Guiab, ACPACI SOASP Chair; Elano C. Marcelo, ACPACI National President; Romualdo V. Murcia III, P&A Foundation Chairperson, Chairman and Managing Partner; Roland C. Pondoc, PICPA National President, and P&A Foundation Trustee, SOASP Project Coordinator and P&A Grant Thornton's Vice Chairman and Deputy Managing Partner Atty. Olivier D. Aznar)

## The 26th Search for the Outstanding Accounting Students of the Philippines has commenced

Last October 8, the Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants (PICPA), Association of Certified Public Accountants in Commerce and Industry (ACPACI), and P&A Foundation Inc., signed a Memorandum of Agreement to commence the 26th Search for the Outstanding Accounting Students of the Philippines (SOASP). The MoA was signed by PICPA National President Roland C. Pondoc, ACPACI National President Elano C. Marcelo, P&A Grant Thornton's Chairman and Managing Partner and P&A Foundation Chairperson Romualdo V. Murcia III, P&A Foundation Trustee, SOASP Project Coordinator and P&A Grant Thornton's Vice Chairman and Deputy Managing Partner Atty. Olivier D. Aznar, and ACPACI SOASP Chair Marc John M. Guiab.

This annual competition is a rigorous battle of intellect and knowledge that aims to recognize and distinguish graduating accounting students from all over the Philippines.

This year's SOASP is gearing up to be bigger and better than ever. With an increased budget and commitment to enhancing the competition experience, this year's event promises significant improvements.

Atty. Aznar, highlighted the efforts made to address last year's feedback, dou-

bling the budget and incorporating technology to motivate students and schools to participate.

Moving away from the traditional pen-and-paper setup, this year's SOASP has embraced technology by providing digital tablets for a more streamlined process and creating a more seamless experience for the participants.

Mr. Murcia shared optimism that the upgrades will elevate the experience for both participants and their mentors, making this year's SOASP the most successful and fulfilling yet. As the grand finals approaches, SOASP is set to showcase the best of the country's accountancy students while reinforcing P&A Grant Thornton's commitment to excellence in the profession.

As the 26th SOASP commenced, Atty. Pondoc commended the students' dedication to accounting, emphasizing that the competition is not just about mathematical precision but also about the values of integrity, responsibility, and transparency that will shape the future of the profession.

The 26th Search for the Outstanding Accountancy Students of the Philippines will occur in March at the Makati Diamond Hotel. Additional updates and details on the event will be announced soon.