

BEATING THE ODDS IN EASTERN VISAYAS

According to statistics, 38 of 100 persons living in Eastern Visayas or Region VIII are poor. This translates to a poverty incidence of 37.8 percent. The Region's poverty incidence is higher than the national average of 28.4 percent.

The Medium-Term Regional Development Plan (MTRDP) of Eastern Visayas, 2004-2010, hopes to address poverty by improving the competitiveness of local industries and agricultural enterprises to spur development and create more jobs for the people of Region VIII.

This Plan provides directions for addressing the priority needs of the region. It is consistent with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the country as contained in the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) where major strategies are based on the 10-point agenda of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

ALL ABOUT EASTERN VISAYAS

Eastern Visayas is famous for two of the country's most important historical events. First, is the discovery of the Philippines by western voyagers led by Magellan in Homonhon Island, Eastern Samar in 1521. Second is the world's largest naval battle in history, the World War II Battle of Leyte Gulf in 1944, which led to the end of the Japanese occupation in the Philippines.

It is the country's top producer of abaca and the third largest coconut-producing region. Other major agricultural commodities in the Region are palay, rootcrops, livestock and fishery. It is also known for its abundant geothermal power reserves and rich deposits of metallic and nonmetallic minerals. Moreover, it is richly endowed with beautiful natural attractions like beaches, caves, mountains, and lakes.

The region's population was estimated at 3.84 million in 2004. It grew by 1.6 percent annually during the period 2000-2005.

THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

The Region's gross regional domestic product (GRDP) or the value of final goods and services produced within the region increased from PhP22.7 billion in year 2000 to PhP24.5 billion in 2003, or an annual rate of increase of 2.6 percent. Among the sectors that contributed to the Region's growth include agriculture and fishery; manufacturing; dwelling and real estate; government services; and trade.

However, the Region's GRDP contribution to the national economy is 2.27 percent. The per capita output of the region based on GRDP for 2003 is PhP6,447. This is lower than the national average of PhP13,139 and that of the National Capital Region's PhP30,970.

Thus, the region plans to implement growth oriented strategies focusing on expanded productivity and competitiveness of agricultural enterprises and industries. These strategies are expected to spur a 7.0 percent growth in the next six years.

STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS

Under the MTRDP, the strategies and action plans include:

- **Improving Productivity**

The Region will improve productivity of major agri-aqua products and the sustainability of natural resources. It will also provide



Biliran Bridge



General McArthur Memorial in Palo, Leyte



San Juanico Bridge

adequate and efficient infrastructure and ICT-based logistics support, and create policies to stimulate and facilitate growth of agriculture and industry.

To increase production of its major agricultural commodities, the Region will : (a) empower local government units (LGUs) to assume primary responsibility in food security and supervision of rice production within their respective areas; (b) organize farmers into cooperatives to increase the scale of farming operations so that farmers will have better prices for their produce; (c) undertake research and development on plant and livestock disease control; (d) tap the export market by producing quality products; and (e) adopt appropriate technology and industrial integration.

The *Kapit Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan* (KALAHI), Comprehensive Integrated Development Social Services (CIDSS) and other antipoverty projects are helping push human development forward through funding of various poverty reducing measures in different areas of the Region.

To improve the region's HDI, the government shall : (a) provide technical and marketing assistance to farmers/fishermen/urban poor in accessing capital from nongovernment agencies (NGAs); (b) increase access to capital via cooperatives and workers associations; (c) improve nutrition and health services; (d) increase enrolment of indigents under PhilHealth; (e) implement ladderized courses along Medicine, Nursing and Care Giving courses; (f) adopt new technologies in classroom/vocational technology, ICT and on-farm instructions; (g) legitimize the Comprehensive Land

Programs and Projects To Improve Productivity

Production

1. Research and development on high-yielding and disease-free planting materials of major agricultural and aquaculture products like abaca, coconut, carageenan, abalone, grouper (lapu-lapu), milkfish (bangus), mackerel, mud crab, lobster and freshwater
2. Agriculture development and rehabilitation program, opening of open-type nurseries, treating 6,849 disease-infected farms and rehabilitating 7,075 unproductive farms; development of 1,500 hectares of coconut development zones
3. Mariculture development project in 10,000 hectares regionwide
4. Establishment of an ICT Park in Leyte

Marketing

5. Ginintuang Masaganang Ani (GMA) Programs – rice, corn, high value commercial crops programs, and livestock
6. Technology development on storage, processing and packaging of the priority commodities
7. Establishment of a fast lane for business license and transport permit for exporters of fresh agri-aqua products
8. Conduct of a study on idle agricultural lands and their stewardship potential for production

For environment and natural resources, an information campaign will be conducted to promote awareness and appreciation of nature conservation in the region. Other strategies include rehabilitation of denuded watersheds to preserve rivers and other fresh water systems; planting of fruit bearing trees; strict enforcement of the Mining Law, Clean Air Act and Ecological Solid Waste Management Act; and creation of an environmental monitoring task force, among others.

In ICT, the government will create an environment conducive to the growth of ICT-based enterprises and institutions, extensively promote ICT facilities and investment opportunities in the region; develop and utilize existing ICT infrastructure; and upgrade from primary to tertiary the quality of education on ICT, English, Math, and Science.

• Enhancing Social Development with Direct Poverty

Human development index (HDI) data revealed that the Region's human development is improving with all the provinces in the Region getting nearer the maximum HDI of 1.0. The HDI is a summary composite index that measures a country's average achievements in three basic aspects of human development: longevity, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

Moreover, the HDI showed that the life expectancy in Eastern Visayas is increasing for both men and women while deaths are decreasing. The data shows that the health status of the people in the region is generally better than the previous years.

Use Plans (CLUPs); (h) strengthen LGU budgetary allocation; (i) strictly enforce the Dangerous Drugs Act, among others.

• Improving Infrastructure and Logistics Support

To support agri-industrial development of the Region, the completion, construction, repair of other major road links like the Maharlika highway that would provide linkage to other regions will be given priority. LGU-based quality assurance units will also be created alongside full implementation of the Procurement Reform Act to set quality/price standard for infra projects. Public/private sector participation in all stages of project development, among others, shall be encouraged.

Among the major programs and projects in the Region include: the geothermal project covering Mt. Cabalian, San Juan Southern Leyte, Mahagnao-Bato, Tongonan, Leyte and Biliran; the irrigation programs of Basey, Catarman-Bobon and Dolores; and the rehabilitation of Maharlika Highway, Leyte-Calubian-San Isidro-Tabango-Villaba road.

The LGUs and regional line agencies will lead in managing the development of the region. For good governance, major programs and projects include formulation of local Tax Revenue Codes; study and replication of best practices on tax incentives; enforcement of the preparation of CLUPs; fast-tracking the implementation of Government Procurement Reform Act; and implementation of Anti-Corruption drive and best practices in promoting a business-friendly environment.