

DevPulse

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Ensuring sustainable growth through **LAND USE PLANNING**

THE SOUTH LUZON Expressway (SLEX) is an important toll road that connects Metro Manila with Laguna and its environs. It begins in Paco, a district in Manila that is predominantly residential. After Paco, it passes through the radiant skyscrapers of Makati and afterwards, Muntinlupa, where factories stand alongside middle class homes. Upon entering Laguna, the landscape changes dramatically as a jambalaya of competing users litter the horizon, with palatial homes, car factories and vast rice fields standing next to each other. Further south, the large white buildings of factories in the Calamba Industrial Park marks the end of the highway's 76-kilometer stretch.

A trip along SLEX illustrates the trend of urbanization and industrialization towards south Luzon and emphasizes the scarcity of land in Metro Manila. In Laguna, gated communities now stand in the same plot of land that a rice farmer used to till; abandoned factories in Muntinlupa have been converted into condominiums and office buildings; skyscrapers in Makati continue to compete on aesthetic and height, but more residents are getting turned off by the high cost of living as well as the congestion in the country's premier business district, urging many to move to the greener suburbs of Alabang and Santa Rosa. The movement of people and the competing uses of land highlight the importance of land use planning, a vital component of development planning.

Land use planning in the Philippines

Development planning channels resources on activities that best achieve development goals; it is done to meet people's basic needs such as housing, education, jobs and health care. Land use planning seeks to accommodate these needs by allocating land between competing and sometimes conflicting uses. It encourages the rational and orderly development of land, promoting the sustainability of both human settlements and the environment. Without land use planning, the country may not be able to maximize its growth potential given that land is a finite resource. It could also result in the wanton and disorderly development of real properties.

The National Land Use Committee (NLUC) takes charge of land use planning in the Philippines. It was institutionalized in 1983 by President Marcos through Letter of Instruction Number 1350, which sought to integrate physical and spatial dimensions in development planning. In December 2008, President Arroyo signed Executive Order 770 that elevated the NLUC into a NEDA Board Committee, a clear indication of the renewed importance given to land use planning. The NEDA Board is the country's highest socioeconomic planning body and is chaired by the President. The NLUC is its seventh interagency committee.

NLUC is tasked with preparing and revising a National Physical Framework Plan (NPFP) and ensure that it supports the Medium-term Philippine Development Plan. It also takes charge of developing and revising national and regional physical framework plans. However, the plans and policies formulated by NLUC only serve as prescriptions. The decision of whether to follow the plans still rests on the shoulders of political leaders at both the national and local levels.

A long-term framework for physical planning

The NLUC formulated the National Framework for Physical Planning (NFPP) 2001-2030 to overcome growth constraints, notably the scarcity of land amid rapid population growth and increasing social and economic activity. It consulted the academe, private sector, non-government organizations and other stakeholders during plan formulation.

The NFPP provides parameters on managing the country's physical resources. Its important features include the following:

- Identifying physical planning issues, both at the national and local levels;
- Appreciating the factors that encourage and discourage land use activities;
- Assessing appropriate location for land use components;
- Recognizing linkages involved in using and allocating land;
- Determining appropriate policy options and corresponding strategies to achieve development objectives.

The NFPP follows the following principles:

- Food security: using the country's resources to provide sufficient and affordable food through local production and importation;
- Environmental sustainability: observing appropriate environmental standards and natural resource management, and promoting a balance between demand for land and preserving ecosystems;
- Rational urban development: encouraging sustainable city and town growth while complementing rural development;
- Spatial integration: linking production and consumption areas to achieve physical and economic integration through infrastructure;
- Equal access: ensuring equal distribution of physical resources and providing equal opportunity in using and acquiring them;
- Private-public partnership: encouraging shared responsibility between government and the private sector in developing and managing physical resources;

- People empowerment: encouraging ordinary citizens to participate in physical planning;
- Recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples: ensuring indigenous peoples' right to develop and manage lands within their ancestral domain; and
- Market orientation: leveraging the market economy in physical planning.

Land use planning and rice self-sufficiency

In 2008, the country suffered from a sudden spike in rice prices. Government swiftly responded by importing more rice and deploying NFA stores across the country. More significantly, it also rolled out a PhP47 billion intervention program called "FIELDS" to increase rice production and promote self sufficiency.

The NLUC played a key role in addressing this issue by identifying long-term policy measures meant to address food self-sufficiency in rice. One of these is the declaration of all rice lands as protected areas, a policy endorsed by the Department of Agriculture and was confirmed by the President through Administrative Orders 226 and 226-A.

In addition, the NLUC is promoting idle land taxation to urge landowners to put their agricultural lands to productive use. It is pushing for amendments to the Local Government Code and the implementing rules and regulations of the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act to allow the sharing of proceeds from idle land tax to municipalities.

The NLUC is also looking for ways to improve the land reclassification process. Land reclassification is the first step towards land use conversion.

Ensuring a brighter future

Despite the ill effects of the global economic crisis, the country continues to enjoy its longest growth cycle in decades. However, relegating land use to the back seat could threaten long-term prospects. Land use planning is a domestic responsibility, where government and other development stakeholders need to play key roles; the inability to formulate and effectively carry out a land use and physical plans cannot be blamed on external forces.

The elevation of the NLUC into a NEDA Board committee is certainly a big boost, but more needs to be done. Nevertheless, the country is moving in the right direction. As long as it takes the straight and narrow path, a brighter future could be ahead of us.