



**Rationalizing Land Use and Responding to Climate Change as
Foundations for Achieving Sustainable Rural Development
and Inclusive Growth**

- *A Policy Paper from the PDF Working Group on Sustainable
Rural Development¹*

The PDF WG on Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) maintains that “rationalizing land use policies and implementation” and “responding to climate change” are essential policy concerns to be addressed with a high priority. This will facilitate the success of existing and future development initiatives in alleviating poverty which is especially high in natural resource dependent rural communities.

Though endowed with rich natural resources, the Philippine rural sector’s potential is still waiting to be realized as a myriad of policy disjoints results to a weak investment climate driving away potential investors and making it most vulnerable to environmental and economic uncertainties.

To resolve this, the PDF WG on SRD strongly commits to the formulation of a long-term vision and strategy (beyond the medium-term development plans) and the programming and implementation of sector-wide approaches in addressing rural development issues based on the National Convergence Initiative’s integrated, eco-system-based “Ridge-to-Reef” concept in close cooperation with local government units.

1. Rationalizing Land Use Policies and Implementation in the Philippines

It is the duty of the State to constantly provide for a rational, holistic and transparent allocation, utilization, management and development of the country’s land resources to ensure its optimum use and consistency with the principles of sustainable development. It is recognized that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive land use law to harmonize and strengthen rational land management to ensure: (i) food security; (ii) rational population distribution and settlements development; (iii) sustainable use of natural resources and (iv) inclusive economic growth.

Toward this end, there is a need to pursue the following policy initiatives:

- **Accelerate completion of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms (CARPER).** Farm investments rise significantly once agricultural lands are redistributed to agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs). On the other

¹ With membership from **National Government Agencies**- Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), House of Representatives-CPBRD(HOR-CPBRD); **Development Partners**-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), United States Agency for International Cooperation (USAID), World Bank (WB), European Commission (EU), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); **Civil Society Organizations** – Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), Philippine Center for Rural Development Studies (CENTROSAKA), Sentrong Alternatibong Lingap Panligal (SALIGAN), Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), KAISAHAN Tungo sa Kaunlaran at Repormang Pansakahan (KAISAHAN), Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in the Rural Areas (PHILDHRRRA). The views or opinions presented in this policy paper are solely those of the representatives and do not necessarily represent those of the institution s/he represents.

hand, due to uncertainty, landowners whose CARPER-eligible lands are still awaiting CARPER implementation, invest significantly less than landowners who have already complied. Such uncertainty must be settled as quickly as possible by deliberate efforts to clear legal and administrative hurdles to accelerated implementation and completion of CARPER.

▪ **Strengthen the system of property rights and land use policy.**

The WG welcomes President Aquino's announcement in his first SONA that the passage of the long-pending National Land Use Bill is a priority legislation and must be vigorously pursued. This would enable institution of participatory and inclusive land use planning and other means to regulate the access to land and other natural resources. This includes updating/revision of policies and guidelines on the delineation of forest boundaries and the distribution of land tenure rights to millions of upland dwellers presently living illegally in the uplands while being deprived of basic services and trapped in deep poverty, thus fulfilling President Aquino's social contract #8: "From government anti-poverty programs that instill a dole-out mentality to well-considered programs that build capacity and create opportunity among the poor and the marginalized in the country".

Also, the country's land administration and management system urgently needs overhaul, towards streamlining processes for land adjudication, titling and registration, transfer of titles, property appraisal and taxation, and access to land information. Addressing all these would require consolidating the functions of several land registration and administration agencies. In this regard, passage of the Land Administration Act (LAA) is essential.

▪ **Improve upland development strategies.** There is a need to strengthen community-based and LGU-driven governance and management of natural resources, especially forests. LGUs should be allowed and encouraged to take on their "rowing" role as national agencies do the "steering". Continued capacity-building for LGUs and communities must be pursued. The WG welcomes the revival of the ecosystem-based "ridge-to-reef" convergence policy of the three rural development departments DA, DAR and DENR to address challenges in the uplands, amongst others. It also welcomes the announced, large-scale Greening Program in combination with conditional cash transfers. Yet, this program will have only lasting anti-poverty effects, if it provides secure and stable land use rights for upland dwellers including indigenous people.

In order to provide efficient, well-orchestrated "converged" services, concerned national government agencies must expeditiously undertake their respective rationalization plans along the principles of optimum subsidiarity and devolution/decentralization.

▪ **Promote sustainable agriculture.** There is a pressing need to preserve the land resource base, protect water resources and promote sustainable agricultural practices. The following specific issues related to sustainable agriculture need urgent attention: (i) land conversion to non-agricultural uses which threaten food security and (ii) rationalization of legal instruments to avoid natural resource conflicts and promote natural resource governance.

▪ **Promote sustainable forest management.** The integrity and sustainable use of forests are of key importance for the fight against climate change, provision of environmental services, and as a potential for economic development and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. The recently issued EO 23 is a bold step towards forest

protection, but may not be enough given the challenges for sustainable management of forests and fight against illegal logging. The Philippines needs a modernized forest policy, such as the *Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management* (HB 3249) that addresses the key drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and creates an enabling environment for sustainable forest management. Key issues are (i) effective protection and management of natural forest, (ii) removal of barriers for investment in sustainable forest management, especially unclear land tenure and forest user rights and tedious bureaucratic procedures and (iii) improved governance in the forest sector. The “National Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) Plus Strategy” provides a good opportunity to address these issues in line with climate protection and reduce poverty in the uplands. It also promotes a mechanism for the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) to manage the environment and natural resources (ENR) whereby the users of the ecosystem/environment services are made to pay the ENR managers.

- **Ensure mining is conducted in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, and is able to account for environmental and social costs.** Although it is important to acknowledge the potential importance of the mining sector in contributing to economic growth, it is also essential to ensure that mining is conducted in an environmentally and socially responsible manner: (i) mining must not take place within protected areas, primary forests and other areas of high environmental significance; (ii) environmental and social impact assessments must be undertaken systematically and without fail prior to approving any mining concession; (iii) more resources for proper environmental monitoring and enforcement of environmental laws must be provided; and (iv) all legal requirements must be effectively enforced to ensure the protection of rights and claims of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities including their fair share of the economic benefits and to prevent the depletion of natural resources. There is a strong recommendation from mining-affected communities and civil society to review the existing government policy of aggressively promoting large-scale mining and a temporary issuance of a moratorium on several controversial mining projects.

2. Responding to a Changing Climate

The Philippines is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate hazards which are expected to worsen with climate change. Its effects could become a major hurdle in attaining economic development and poverty alleviation goals.

The PDF WG on SRD welcomes the development of the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP). It will be important that especially adaptation will be mainstreamed into national and local planning and budgeting to make the country fit for the current and future challenges associated with global warming. Therefore the longer-term visions and key measures of the NCCAP 2011-2028 should be fully integrated into the PDP 2011-2016.

The following measures are urgently called for to strengthen the country's capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change:

- **Capacitate institutions.** The Climate Change Commission shall fully clarify roles and mandates of GPH institutions related to climate change and develop their capacities for the tasks ahead in line with the NCCAP.
- **Mainstream climate-resilient development strategies.** Climate risk considerations and adaptation to climate change should be mainstreamed in national and local development planning, programming, budgeting and monitoring processes and clearly linked to disaster risk reduction. Climate-related damage to life and infrastructure can be reduced by appropriate policies, sound strategies, and timely action.

- **Ensure food security under a changing climate.** Agriculture and food production are largely dependent on climatic patterns and any shift in temperature and precipitation may depress farm yield and income. It is recommended that appropriate climate change adaptation measures are developed, taken and integrated in agriculture and food security planning and project implementation.
- **Assess the effects of biofuels on food supply, forests and biodiversity.** With the enactment of the Biofuels Act in 2007, there are significant efforts to ramp up production of biofuels in the Philippines with emphasis on bioethanol from sugarcane and biodiesel from coconut and Jatropha, among others. Some fear that biofuel crops could compete for land with food crops and even lead to increased deforestation as what has been happening in other countries. It is recommended that current biofuel and land use policies be examined to avoid conflicts that could affect food supply, forest cover and biodiversity.
- **Enhance climate change resilience of vulnerable communities.** Rising sea levels and extreme weather events such as typhoons and the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon are expected to affect an increasing number of Filipinos. It is therefore recommended that GPH, including LGUs, formulate policies, finance and implement measures that will enhance the resilience of communities to cope with current and future climate risks.

A healthy natural environment is the best basis for adaptation to climate change risks and reducing the vulnerability of rural communities towards climate change. It is therefore recommended that increased efforts are taken to urgently address deforestation, sustainable management of forest, coastal-marine resources, integrated water resource management and sustainable agriculture.

The PDF WG on SRD welcomes and supports private-public partnerships that contribute to sustainable development in rural areas.

Convener: Undersecretary Segfredo R. Serrano, DA (llanera72@yahoo.com)
Co-Convener: Dr. Walter Salzer, GIZ (walter.salzer@giz.de)