

PDF Working Group on Sustainable Rural Development

Proposed Agenda for the Philippine Development Forum 2009

The PDF WG on Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) identified “rationalizing land use policies and implementation” and “responding to climate change” as essential policy concerns to be addressed with a high priority in order to facilitate the success of existing and future development initiatives in alleviating poverty which is especially high in 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 and implementation of sector-wide or program-based approaches in addressing rural development issues.

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 proper 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 a need to harmonize and strengthen land laws and their implementation to ensure: (i) food security; (ii) rational population distribution and settlements development; and (iii) equitable, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Toward this end, there is a need to pursue the following policy initiatives:

- **Accelerate completion of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).** Farm investments rise significantly once agricultural lands are redistributed to agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs). On the other hand, due to uncertainty, landowners whose CARP-eligible lands are still awaiting CARP 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 CARP. Moreover, the subdivision of previously-issued mother Certificates of Land Ownership Awards (CLOAs) into individual titles should also be accelerated to fast-track amortization by ARBs and facilitate access to credit.
- **Strengthen the system of property rights and land use policy.** 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. It also requires instituting participatory and inclusive land use planning and other means to regulate the access to land and other natural resources including updating/revision of policies and guidelines on the delineation of forest boundaries. In this regard, passage of the Land Administration Reform Act (LARA), the long-pending National Land Use Act (NaLUA) and other related legislations must be vigorously pursued.
- **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. Moreover, there is need to fortify the convergence and cooperation among the DA, DAR and DENR to address challenges in the uplands. Concerned national government agencies must expeditiously undertake their respective rationalization plans under Executive Order 366 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 Philippines need a modernised forest policy 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.

- **Ensure mining is conducted in an environmentally and socially responsible manner and is able to account for all environmental 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 should not take place within protected areas, primary forests and other areas of high environmental significance; (ii) environmental and social impact assessments should be undertaken systematically and without fail prior to approving any mining concession; (iii) more resources, for proper environmental monitoring and enforcement of environmental laws should be provided; and (iv) all legal requirements should 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.

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 move of the President to assume a lead role in the fight against Climate Change under Executive Order 774 and under the recently signed progressive Climate Change Act with the establishment of the Climate Change Commission that will be in charge to elaborate a Climate Change Strategy and direct all sectors to cooperate towards the fulfillment of the vision of sustainable development. The development a National Framework Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change that will mainstream adaptation into sector policies and planning at all levels will significantly contribute to make the country fit for the future challenges associated with global warming. Despite the existence of a range of activities related to climate change and new projects coming up to help the country cope with its impacts, much remains to be done. The following measures are urgently called for to strengthen the country's capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change:

- **Rationalize and capacitate institutions.** It is recommended that the GOP conduct an in-depth analysis of the mandate, functions and capacities of existing structures and formulate a more streamlined and cohesive institutional set-up as well as policies to address climate change. The Climate Change Commission and its anticipated function provide opportunities to clarify roles and mandates of GoP institutions related to climate change and to develop their capacities for the tasks ahead.
- **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. 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 and forests.** 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. Certain sectors 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 and natural forest cover.
- **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 GOP, including LGUs, formulate policies and implement measures that will enhance the resilience of communities to cope with current and future climate risks.

Conserve and manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. A healthy natural environment is the best basis for adaptation to climate change risks and reducing the vulnerability of rural population towards climate change. It is therefore recommended that increased efforts are taken to urgently address deforestation, sustainable management of forest and marine resources, integrated water resource management, sustainable agriculture and other related management issues.