



HISGUT KALIBUNGAN

HURUHISGUTAY 1 POLICY BRIEF

27 November 2020

SUMMARY

In the first online roundtable discussion in the *Hisgut Kalibungan* series, experts discussed the state of the environment in Eastern Visayas, specifically to identify issues and concerns affecting the environment and natural resources and their impact on the sustainable development of the region. The following recommendations for local policymakers and implementers were discussed.

- Treat all environmental issues and concerns as equally important.
- Intensify the information, education, and communication campaign for sustainable development.
- Revisit existing regional development plans to meet sustainable development goals.
- Intensify the dissemination and coordination of development plans, programs, and policies.
- Formulate development plans, programs, and policies using a bottom-up approach.
- Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementers and the implementation of plans, programs, and policies.
- Review the functions of and strengthen coordination among the different bureaus or divisions of line government agencies to streamline the organization and harmonize program/project development and improve implementation.
- Strengthen the enforcement capacity of concerned LGAs, stakeholders, and the community.
- Explore existing convergence models in the country to develop efficient and effective implementation of environmental conservation measures and management systems in the region.

INTRODUCTION

Eastern Visayas is home to a wide range of ecosystems, plants, animals, and other types of living organisms. Considering their ecological importance, some of these ecosystems are declared as key biodiversity areas while others are protected areas. At the same time, these biological resources serve as primary source of food and income for many local communities in Region 8, and the region's biodiversity is threatened by natural hazards and destructive human activities.

Essentially, the environmental issues in Eastern Visayas are diverse, complex, and interrelated. The most pressing environmental issues and concerns include forest degradation, improper solid waste disposal, irresponsible mining activities, wildlife poaching, timber poaching, overexploitation of coastal resources, use of unsustainable fishing and farming practices, and reclamation/conversion of coastal ecosystems. In addition, the weak implementation of economic and environmental programs, projects, and policies likewise contribute to the destruction of the already depleted natural resources. At times, these problems stem from the formulation of uninformed development plans resulting from lack of research and lack of coordination between and among concerned line government agencies (LGAs), local government units (LGUs), academe, other stakeholders, and the community. Moreover, the compartmentalized organization of LGAs with overlapping functions and mandates, and the convoluted bureaucracy, promotes confusion, slows down performance, and drains already limited fiscal and human resources. All of these problems lead to biodiversity loss, which adversely affects the quality of the provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural functions of the environment.

Anchored on the principle of sustainable development, the Eastern Visayas Regional Development Plan (EVRDP) charts strategies that aim to avoid, minimize, and compensate for the ill effects of current and future economic development activities that may exacerbate environmental degradation. However, the strategies are rather broad, and there is a need to detail how to operationalize the approaches laid out in the plan. There is an urgent need to develop appropriate and informed strategies for a more efficient and effective way of planning and implementing economic and environmental programs and projects for the sustainable development of Region 8.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on "*Huruhisgutay 1: Setting the Directions for Environmental Conservation in Eastern Visayas*", the first roundtable discussion in the online *Hisgut Kalibungan* series spearheaded by the Leyte Samar Heritage Center of UP Visayas Tacloban College (UPVTC). Prof. Margarita T. de la Cruz, Executive Director of Guiuan Development Foundation, Inc., was the lead discussant in *Huruhisgutay 1*, and the panelists were Dr. Eulito V. Casas, Jr., Chair of the UPVTC Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Dr. Arturo N. Salazar, DENR Regional Office 8 Assistant Regional Director for Management Services; Mrs. Maribel B. Munsayac, EMB Regional Office 8 Chief for Clearance and Permitting Division; and Mr. Jay-ar O. Ragub, Senior Economic Development Specialist of NEDA Regional Office 8.

The recommendations are intended to help policymakers design effective strategies for well-coordinated and holistic environmental conservation programs/projects in Eastern Visayas.

1. **Treat environmental issues and concerns as equally important.** Each environmental issue and concern in Eastern Visayas must be given proper attention. This is because the existing environmental problems and their impact are interconnected and can only be addressed through a systems

perspective. At the same time, due to lack of resources, there must be a prioritization in terms of budget allocation for programs and projects that can respond to overarching or crosscutting environmental issues.

2. **Intensify the information, education, and communication (IEC) campaign for sustainable development.** By taking advantage of existing communication technology (e.g. social media), IEC campaigns highlighting the most pressing environmental issues will help raise awareness among local stakeholders and members of the community. For example, efforts on basic ecological solid waste management education among LGUs, other stakeholders, and the community must be intensified. All must be made aware of how improper waste disposal leads to pollution (e.g. plastic pollution) that results in poor air, soil, and water quality.
3. **Revisit existing regional development plans to meet sustainable development goals.** The region must be able to demonstrate how to attain the triple bottom line of sustainable development, namely, environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity. Ensuring ecological integrity and a clean and healthy environment is part of the foundational strategies of the EVRDP to achieve sustainable development in the region. On the other hand, the goals of the existing EVRDP are to achieve robust and sustained economic growth, and reduce poverty and inequality in all dimensions. These development goals as stated sound too human-centered and can be modified by adding another pillar that will reflect the foundation strategies in EVRDP that seek to ensure the enhancement of the health of the environment.
4. **Intensify the dissemination and coordination of development plans, programs, and policies.** Some plans developed at the regional level have encountered difficulties in implementation and other plans have never taken off. To avoid such failure, sharing and coordination of overarching development plans, like the EVRDP, must be intensified by the planning agency such that it will be cascaded from the implementing LGAs down to the LGUs who are at the frontlines of implementing the specified strategies. Most importantly, the planning and development councils of each LGU (from the province to the barangays) must be well oriented and prepared for the implementation of the regional development plans, programs, and policies.
5. **Formulate development plans, programs, and policies using a bottom-up approach.** The bottom-up approach will help prevent or minimize failure in the implementation of plans, programs, and policies and at the same time ensure that strategies resolve the real environmental concerns at the grassroots level.
6. **Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementers and the implementation of plans, programs and policies.** Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the performance of implementers in terms of how they facilitate the implementation of plans, programs, and policies can be helpful in revising/amending existing policies or in creating/developing new ones. Sometimes the failure of a program or policy is due to the poor performance of the implementers rather than the program design or policy articulation. On the other hand, it is important to monitor beyond the program/project's lifetime (i.e. ex-post evaluation) to see whether the program/project has satisfactorily delivered its expected outcomes. The reactivation of local program/project monitoring committees to conduct M&E of programs and projects at the LGU level, as mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991, should be looked into.
7. **Review the functions of and strengthen coordination among the different bureaus or divisions of line government agencies to streamline the organization and harmonize program/project development and improve implementation.** This strategy will help resolve issues in the discharge of similar and overlapping functions and mandates between and among line bureaus under one department or between and among different LGAs. It will also help maximize and channel the fiscal and human resources of these agencies into comprehensive programs, projects, activities, and policies.
8. **Strengthen the enforcement capacity of concerned LGAs, stakeholders, and the community.** Though there is a proposal to strengthen the enforcement powers of the DENR, what can be done now is to intensify community empowerment in the implementation of existing environmental laws and policies. Primarily, this approach can be achieved through training programs and other capacity-building activities.
9. **Explore existing convergence models in the country to develop efficient and effective implementation of environmental conservation measures and management systems in the region.** Existing models of convergence in the country can be examined to develop an appropriate strategy that will engage stakeholders in working towards the advancement of sustainable development in the region. This convergence must be led by a credible organization that has a track of being effective and efficient in bringing together different stakeholders from various sectors (e.g. LGUs, agencies, academe). In addition, the organization should be committed to advancing participatory and community-based approaches. More inter-LGU and inter-agency alliances are needed to facilitate the efficient and effective implementation of development plans and programs as well as enforcement of environmental policies in the region.

These recommendations are being put forward for planners and decision makers to consider in their efforts to achieve economic growth and social equity while living in harmony with nature.

This policy brief has been prepared by the Leyte Samar Heritage Center of UP Visayas Tacloban College based on "*Huruhisgutay 1: Setting the Directions for Environmental Conservation in Eastern Visayas*", the first in the online *Hisgut Kalibungan* discussion series, which aims to provide expert analysis of the most pressing environmental issues and concerns in Eastern Visayas.