

INTERVENTION STORIES

Antique in the spotlight **Local economic development designed to create youth employment**

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In the Philippines, a great number of young people cannot find work. According to the 2011 data from the National Statistics Office, almost half of unemployed were young workers aged 15-24 years. Unemployment rate among the youth was 16.3 per cent (representing a little more than 1.4 million). This is more than twice the national figure of 7 per cent. There is also a growing concern about nearly 2.3 million young people who are trapped in vulnerable forms of employment.

Youth employment challenge in Antique

The province of Antique — which lies on the western seaboard of Panay island in the central Philippines — also has its fair share of youth unemployment. A breakdown of the composition of unemployed and underemployed youth in the province reveals the complexity of the issues. More than half of unemployed youth in the Western Visayas region (including Antique) are high school graduates and college undergraduates. Also, the

Fishing vessels seen at low tide in San Jose, Antique. Fishing is a major occupation in the province (© ILO/ W. San Pedro)



majority of 62.7 per cent of underemployed youth are found in agriculture and fishing (NSO: 2008).

The reliance on traditional means of livelihood in the agriculture and fishing sectors has led to a situation of too many people chasing too few jobs, including young people. Many continue to subsist in the margins in various forms of informal employment, while others leave the province to try their luck in other cities, such as Iloilo and Manila, as well as in other countries.

Youth resort to labour migration

The province is the main source of *sacadas*, migratory workers, mostly in the 15-24 age bracket, who work seasonally in the sugar plantations of Panay and neighbouring Negros Island. Antique has also been and continues to be a source of nurses, caregivers, seafarers, domestic workers, blue-collar workers and other professionals for many countries around the globe.

The Antique Youth and Migrant Center reports that the province receives total annual remittances amounting to PhP4.5 billion from Filipino land-based and sea-based overseas workers who are originally from Antique. Such capital inflows from overseas remittances, however, have not been fully tapped to benefit local communities.

Interventions to promote youth employment

Existing policies and programmes on youth employment are implemented in a fragmented manner or have minimal impact on their target group. Growth sectors with potential for youth employment are not fully developed. Moreover, youth do not participate in local development processes. Another challenge is the limited capacities of local governments to provide an enabling environment to promote growth and employment in general and for the youth in particular.

Local economic development as a strategy

Under the Local Government Code of the Philippines, local government units (LGUs) are given mandates to undertake economic and investment planning as well as other functions that contribute to

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growth and employment generation. While assigning a pivotal role to local governments, the Local Government Code also mandates citizen participation in various areas of development planning and implementation.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) supports this thrust, particularly the promotion of employment and decent work, through local economic governance and by strengthening various local functions relevant to this task.

Local economic development relies on participatory processes, social dialogue, and partnerships among local stakeholders. It requires capacity development of duty bearers to tap into local strengths and resources, utilize policy tools for local development, and mobilize stakeholders in the process of planning and implementation of development strategies. These strategies are to be pursued in a manner that creates sustainable economic activities and decent jobs, including for the youth and other target groups.

Antique's LED strategy

The Antique Provincial Government initiated a series of LED interventions in partnership with ILO under the Spanish-funded *MDG F Joint Programme on Alternatives to Migration: Decent Jobs for Filipino Youth*. The interventions sought to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of "full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people" through stronger governance capacities and stakeholder participation.



A youth representative makes recommendations on how to promote tourism in Antique (© ILO/ SDC Asia)

The above partnership involved capacity building of local officials in assessing the local environment and opportunities, providing tools for policy making and development planning, and identifying local financial resources and revenue generation. It further provided the vehicle for mobilizing agencies and local stakeholders towards framing strategic policies and

projects for developing the economy, especially towards youth employment.

Strengthening provincial capacity to develop the local economy

Thus, in Antique, the ILO implemented a training and mentoring programme for LGUs in collaboration with the Ateneo School of Government. The same approach was implemented in Masbate, Maguindanao, and Agusan del Sur, pilot provinces of the Joint Programme.

Training modules consisted of the following:

- (a) Empowering Leaders in LED
- (b) Policy Development and Analysis
- (c) Project Management
- (d) Public Financial Management and Resource Mobilization
- (e) Entrepreneurship Development for the Youth.

Each training module was developed based on an assessment of capacities and training needs of local officials in local economic development and governance.



Ailene Maguad, Provincial LEIPO, shares proposed community-based ecotourism project during the training model on project management (© ILO/ Ateneo School of Government)

The participants of the programme represented a wide range of stakeholders. They included local chief executives of the provinces, heads of local planning, treasury, social development, health, and investment agencies, the private sector, non-government organizations, national government agencies and youth organizations.

As post-training support, the Ateneo School of Government provided mentoring and coaching as the participants went about implementing their action plans. These action plans have to do with, among others, forming LED teams, preparing strategic plans and policy papers, and drafting a feasibility study for their selected economic support project.

Antique's development and sectoral strategies

LED team. The LED team provides a more broadly shared and potentially durable process for decision making at the provincial level. The LED team is composed of key officials and stakeholders, including the provincial local economic and investment promotion office (LEIPO). Through the LED team, various local agencies mobilized themselves towards a common economic strategy.

Bringing the initiative closer to institutionalization, Provincial Governor Exequiel Javier will sign an Executive Order for its formal creation by the 4th quarter of 2012. The LED team will become a subcommittee of the Economic Development Committee with the provincial LEIPO as the head.

Strategic plan. A five-year LED strategic plan was formulated, articulating the vision, goal, and programmes of the province. The strategic plan focuses on developing key sectors such as tourism and agribusiness to stimulate the economy. Public and private partnership agreements on these chosen sectors were integrated in the Annual Investment Program (AIP) for 2013, a provincial development plan, which is submitted for funding from the national government in support of development projects.

Development plans involve the establishment of physical and social infrastructure towards economic and social development. They take into account, not only roads, utilities, transport and communication, but also institutions that extend basic services, provide health care, maintain law and order, provide education and training, and protect rights to contracts. Some of these measures were among the contents of local development policies and plans developed by the participants, with special attention to the youth. These outputs are described in the rest of this article.

Policy paper and local legislation. As an output of the Policy Development and Analysis module, the Antique team drafted a policy paper, entitled "Institutionalization of Comprehensive Scholarship Program in Antique." The Scholarship Program aims to benefit the poor but deserving youth of Antique towards better education opportunities so that they may eventually land decent employment. The Program will also establish a tracking system that will examine the links between the scholarship programme and youth employment.

To ensure continuity of this Program, the local government will issue an ordinance that establishes the scholarship programme and mandate an annual budget from the Special Appropriation (General Fund) under the Office of the Governor, Sangguniang Kabataan, and Gender and Development Fund.

Feasibility study. Resulting from the Project Management module, the local team identified growth sectors that can generate employment for the youth. These sectors include tourism, food and bamboo processing, and muscovado sugar. With tourism sector viewed as one of the priority sectors with high potentials for youth employment and income generation in Antique, the ILO supported the local government in conducting a value chain analysis of the sector. The report has clear recommendations for upgrading the province's product portfolio, improving infrastructure, stepping up a marketing campaign, and updating the Tourism Development Plan.



Council of Tono adopts the feasibility study of the community-based ecotourism project "Tono Waterfalls Eco-Adventure" (Photo source: Ritche Jermia)

Meanwhile, the team carried out a feasibility study on a community-based ecotourism project called "Tono Waterfalls Eco-Adventure" in Barangay Tono in the municipality of Tibiao.

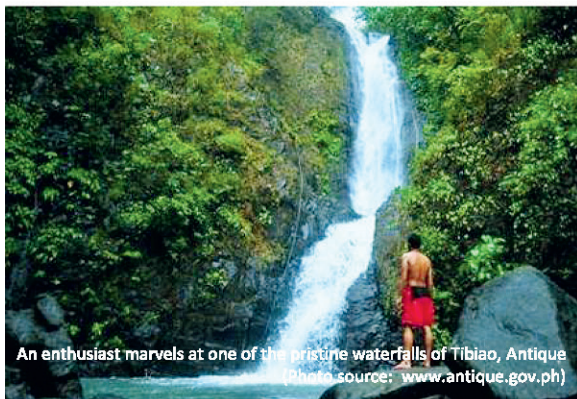
The feasibility study was developed in consultation with the community and youth representatives. Its objectives include the following: to a) provide alternative employment to at least 80 youth (aged 15-24) including *sacadas*; b) promote conservation of natural endowment and preservation of local culture among the community residents; and, c) increase local revenues by at least PHP300,000 by the end of the project.

The feasibility study was adopted by the Municipal Development Council of Tibiao and the Barangay Council of Tono upon the endorsement of Governor Javier and the advocacy of the LEIPO. To implement the project, the Municipal Government of Tibiao allocated PHP500,000 from the Tourism General Fund. The Provincial Governor furthermore earmarked PHP1 million to cement the road leading to Barangay Tono, which is now also part of the AIP for 2013.

Given their potential for providing employment opportunities to the youth and returning migrant workers, similar projects will be implemented in five other barangays in Tibiao and in the neighbouring town of Culasi.

Business plan. Aided by the local team which participated in the Entrepreneurship Development for the Youth module, a group of twenty five (25) young entrepreneurs from Sibalom is set to start an enterprise in local tour guiding. The LED team helped them develop a business plan on providing guiding services to local and foreign tourists.

As the first venture of this young enterprising group, which calls itself *Marikudo Local Guiding Service*, it will develop a group of globally competitive local tour guides who can showcase the natural and cultural endowments of Antique. The group will be registered with the Cooperative Development Authority within the year.



Again, the value chain report on tourism sector of Antique was a key reference material in formulating the key directions and strategies underlying the feasibility study and the business plan.

Enhancement of knowledge, skills, and attitude on LED. In summary, the capacity building programme enhanced the participants' knowledge on designing local economic strategies in way that supports priority target groups, such as the youth in the labour force, and envisaged lead sectors, such as tourism.

Participants affirmed that the programme has improved their capacities in participatory planning, policy development, project management, public financial management, and entrepreneurship development for the youth. It also helped them define a common objective, honed their skills, and directed their functions towards promoting economic development in the province.

Sustaining learning on LED. Towards the end of the programme, the Provincial Government conducted an orientation on LED for other local government units across the 18 municipalities of Antique. They received expressions of interest in sustaining and replicating the initial gains of the programme. A case in point, as earlier mentioned, is replication of a community-based ecotourism project to five other barangays and in nearby town of Culasi.

Challenges, sustainability, and lessons learned

It is reasonable to expect that the local government can sustain the initiatives beyond the Joint Programme, for the following reasons.

The LGUs, first and foremost, are at the forefront of promoting growth and employment in their jurisdictions. Building their capacities on LED will help them perform their functions as enablers of local development.

Despite challenges in local capacities and competing work demands, the satisfactory completion of the training outputs proves that there is sufficient capacity and strong enthusiasm among local officials to take on the challenge of local development and youth employment. There is a growing recognition among the participants of their responsibility as advocates of local development -- beyond just relying on single agencies or on the chief executive.

The entire LED process demonstrates the importance of the directing and coordinative role of the local government in achieving the socio-economic growth in the province. At the same time, it demonstrates the importance of participation among the youth and other local stakeholders in the local development process.

LED is anchored on understanding the strengths of an economy and wielding the right policy and administrative tools to stimulate growth and employment in general as well as in key sectors. In Antique, efforts were piloted around the tourism sector which is viewed to have high potentials for youth employment and income generation.

Needless to say, strong political will and support of the provincial leadership is a decisive factor in launching and sustaining LED initiatives. The process which Antique went through in this partnership with ILO shows how this political will can be, not only strong, but widely shared though the involvement of duty bearers and through the collaborative exercise of policy development tools -- all aimed towards real stakeholder participation and inclusive development.

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