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No more hungry Pinoy, Marcos vows

Gov't aiming to reduce poverty incidence from 18.1% to 9%

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

President Marcos assured Filipinos that his administration will continue to work hard to ensure there will be no more hungry Filipino.

Marcos gave the assurance at the 56th founding anniversary celebration of Davao del Sur on Saturday, July 1.

In his speech, the President said that giving the best services to the Filipino people is his way of thanking them for their trust and confidence in him during the 2022 elections.

"Muli, uulitin ko ang aking pagpasalamat sa inyong suporta at tulon at pag-alala sa nakaraan (Again, I'm expressing my gratitude for the support, the help, and for remembering the past)," the President said. "Huwag sana po kayong ► **5**



DAVAO COASTAL ROAD — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. (third from left) and Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel Bonoan (third from right) unveil the marker at the opening of the first segment of the coastal bypass road in Matina, Davao City, on Saturday, July 1. Also present at the unveiling are, from left, Senator Imee Marcos, Vice President Sara Duterte, Davao City Mayor Sebastian Duterte, and Davao City Vice Mayor Melchor Quitain Jr. (Keith Bacongco)



No more hungry Pinoy, Marcos vows 1◀

magsawa at kami naman ang aming isusukli sa inyong pagmamahal ay ang aming pawis na hindi mauubos hangga't masasabi natin tapos na ang trabaho, hangga't masasabi natin wala ng gutom na Pilipino (Don't get weary. In return for your love, we will sweat it out until we finally realize that the job is done, until we realize there will be no more hungry Filipino)."

With the local government focusing on all aspects of their daily lives, Marcos said Filipinos could look forward to a boost in local businesses, improved daily transactions, and an overall better quality of life.

One of the government's programs to alleviate hunger and poverty among families in the lowest income bracket is the "food stamp" program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

9% poverty incidence eyed

During the first en banc meeting of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) on June 30, President Marcos ordered government agencies to employ the whole-of-government approach to combat the long-standing problem of poverty in the Philippines, anchored on the target to reduce poverty incidence from 18.1 percent to 8.8 to 9 percent. The en banc meeting coincided

with NAPC's 25th founding anniversary.

During the meeting the President reminded agencies engaged in providing social services to assist the needy in the country of the importance of coordination among the government agencies and local government units (LGUs) to combat the long-standing problem of poverty.

"I think it all comes down to the same thing... like the NAPC, is a dedicated organization agency to look at the incidents of poverty and what are the things that can be done," he said.

In a tweet, President Marcos said the whole-of-government approach would ensure effective social services for the people.

"Binigyang-pansin natin ang pagsasaayos ng Anti-Poverty Action Agenda ng administrasyon para sa kapakanan ng mga kababayan nating lubos na nangangailangan (We paid attention to ironing out our Anti-Poverty Action Agenda for the benefit of our countrymen in need)," he said. "Sa pamamagitan ng whole-of-government approach, layunin nating matugunan ang kahirapan sa bansa (With this whole-of-government approach, we aim to address poverty in the country)."

In his speech at the 56th founding anniversary celebration of Davao del Sur, Marcos also as-

sured the people that the national government fully supports them in ensuring the success of their initiatives "and the success of the people and the province of Davao del Sur."

'Let's unite'

The President reiterated his call for unity, saying it was his biggest challenge to Filipinos.

"Let us come together to provide brighter, more stable, and more prosperous lives for ourselves, our families, and for those who come after us," Marcos said.

Meanwhile, Marcos said each government entity should know its functions and responsibilities to maximize the resources poured into helping indigents in communities, especially during crises.

"Now, we have to differentiate. Kailangan pagsama-samahin natin (We need to consolidate), and that's why we have to start at a baseline," he said. "And we engage the other agencies. Huwag natin sasabihin, bigyan natin ng budget 'yung NAPC, sila mag-implement niyan (Let's not just give the NAPC budget and let them implement)."

According to the chief executive, NAPC needs to continue to engage residents of depressed communities to determine what is really needed in those areas.

"Yung mga ibang lugar na tala-

gang hindi makabangon dahil wala, walang tulong, walang ano, walang kalsada, walang facilities, walang infrastructure. Identify natin 'yun [mga lugar] para pun-tahan natin kung ano man 'yung kailangan nila (We need to identify the areas which could not get out of poverty for lack of aid, roads, facilities, or infrastructure)," he said. "Hanapin natin kung saan talaga yung problematic na area and then engage natin lahat ng ibang departamento para the other departments (Let's identify the problematic areas and engage the other departments so they can come in.)"

Poverty alleviation plans

During the meeting, NAPC lead convenor Lope Santos III told Marcos about the plans and activities of the commission conducted in the past months, including its consultations with its members, the leagues of LGUs, national government agencies (NGAs), and other basic sectors.

He added that their plans were anchored on the target defined in the Philippine Development Plan (PDP)—to reduce poverty from 18.1 percent to 8.8 to 9 percent.

"We immediately defined the urgent tasks at hand in accordance with the mandate of NAPC, which is a coordinating and advisory body of the agency," Santos said. "So, our urgent task, Mr. President, is to align all development plans (with the) Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028, which constitutes the formulation and adoption of the National Anti-Poverty Action Agenda, and we expect to complete this, Mr. President, by September this year."

Santos said they plan to roll out the Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan starting in 2024 to be mainstreamed in all provincial development and fiscal framework plans and comprehensive development plans of LGUs, including in the respective annual investment plans.

The NAPC official likewise shared that they have come up with the National Anti-Poverty Action Agenda (N3A), which is also aligned with the PDP 2023-2028 and focuses on the strategic direction and flagship programs to address multidimensional poverty concerns, social economic, ecological, and governance.



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No empty promise: BBM committed to end hunger

By ALEXIS ROMERO

A day after his first anniversary in office, President Marcos maintained that his promises were not just campaign slogans, as he vowed to work until not a single Filipino suffers from hunger.

In a speech during the 56th founding anniversary of Davao del Sur yesterday, Marcos thanked those who supported him during last year's presidential race and reiterated his call for unity, his main message during the campaign.

"I hope you will not get tired (of supporting us) and we will repay your love with our sweat that will not run out until the work is done, until we can say that no Filipino is hungry," the President said in Filipino.

"We are continuously doing something about the things we talked about during the campaign. It is not just a campaign slogan. That is what we call unity... Now, we are fulfilling our promises to the people, our promises to you," he added.

Marcos, also the agriculture secretary, previously said ending hunger is the goal he aims to achieve by the end of his term. He has repeatedly cited the need to boost the agriculture sector to ensure that food is accessible to ordinary Filipinos.

Marcos said only Ilocos Norte, his hometown, has upstaged Davao del Sur in terms of support for his administration.

"Rest assured your support will not be

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in vain," he said in Filipino.

Security, health

At the same event, Marcos praised the provincial government for its accomplishments in key areas like security and health. He noted that Davao del Sur is the first province in the region to be declared insurgency-free.

"That is not a small feat. We know that peace will improve the lives of our countrymen. That is the first step," the Chief Executive said, underscoring the need for peace in nation building.

"We know that what we need to improve the lives of our countrymen is peace," he said.

"Through your diligent and compassionate implementation of the Tupad Pangako Program you are able to accomplish this while also helping former rebels reintegrate into society to take part in building our nation," he added.

Tupad Pangako is a program that helps former rebels reintegrate into society by providing them

with the necessary skills and assistance.

"It's very encouraging to see you all working hand in hand, and to know that the Provincial Government's projects are all aligned with my administration's eight-point socioeconomic agenda. I urge all of you to remain determined in promoting peace, in promoting development in your province," Marcos said.

Marcos also recognized the provincial government's efforts to improve the local health care system as he emphasized the need to fortify health facilities to make them ready for pandemics like COVID and disasters. He likewise cited the provincial government's move to digitalize and streamline its processes to achieve sound fiscal management and bureaucratic efficiency.

"With the local government focusing on all aspects of your daily life that we have identified in the national agenda, we can look forward to a boost in local businesses, improved daily transactions and an overall better quality of life. Rest assured that the National Government fully supports you in ensuring the success of your initiatives and the success of the people and of the province of Davao del Sur," he added.

- With Diana Lhyd Suelto

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Thoughts on Marcos' first year

Our assessment of the Marcos administration's first year in office is based largely on how it has addressed Filipinos' top three most important and urgent national concerns: 1) controlling inflation, 2) increasing the pay of workers, and 3) creating more jobs.

Here are what we consider the administration's five most important wins and five critical areas for improvement.

Wins:

1. Condonation of unpaid amortization and interests on the loans of agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs). It will give ARBs wider access to credit which would improve agricultural productivity as they can allocate more of their income toward purchasing agricultural inputs or expanding farming operations. This can also lead to more employment opportunities and overall economic growth in rural areas.

2. Ratification of the Philippines' membership in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Currently the world's largest free trade agreement, the RCEP is expected to eliminate tariff rates for goods like canned tuna, coffee, coconut water, fruit cocktail, fresh papaya, durian, leather goods, bicycles, etc. This will help decrease the prices of these goods in the country.

3. Issuance of the Public Service Act (PSA) implementing rules and regulations (IRR), which can lead to more job-creating investments. The amended PSA opened various public utility sectors such as telecommunications and transportation to 100 percent foreign equity. The issuance of the IRR will now put the law to effect in attracting key investors. The passage of PSA amendments last year has allowed Starlink, a satellite internet provider, to invest in the country.

4. Amendments to the IRR of the Renewable Energy (RE) Act of 2008 opened the sector to more foreign investors at 100 percent foreign equity. This will help increase investments in RE projects in the country, create new jobs, and lower the costs of production which would help curb inflation. Recently, the Department of Energy welcomed

COMMENTARY

GARY B. TEVES

a \$5 billion investment from Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners to harness 2,000 megawatts of offshore wind power.

5. Unemployment rate for April 2023 reached a four-month low of 4.5 percent and **underemployment rate** declined to 11.2 percent in March 2023, the lowest since April 2005.

Areas for improvement:

1. Amend warehouse receipts law to allow farmers to sell produce at the best time, earn better income, help decrease post-harvest losses, and give banks and financial institutions more confidence to lend to the sector. To better address supply chain issues, the government must also solve other components (e.g., farm-to-market roads, farming technologies) and reduce the influence of cartels and traders on the prices of agricultural products in the market.

2. Appoint an agriculture secretary who is directly accountable to the President and can focus on the sector, considering food prices remain high. However, since the President has decided to continue as agriculture secretary, he must focus on food consolidation, supply chain support, lowering production inputs, product diversification, and modernization.

3. Pass the apprenticeship bill and improve other skills training. The bill proposes a longer training period (from the current maximum of six months to a maximum of two years), which will allow businesses to provide better training while preserving workers' rights, helping more Filipinos qualify for and get better jobs.

4. Ensure the economic viability and social desirability of the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF). MIF's success hinges largely on the competence and integrity of the fund managers and independent directors of the Maharlika Investment Corp. (MIC) who will be appointed by the President. They should focus on investing in projects that will yield higher

financial and social benefits than what Landbank and Development Bank of the Philippines are currently earning from lending to their clients (around 5-7 percent per annum over five years). A higher rate of return could encourage local and foreign investors to invest in the MIF and, therefore, reduce its dependence on state funds for its continued existence.

5. Improve the decision-making process by holding Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (Ledac) meetings frequently. President Marcos should not only convene but also preside over Ledac, which is a proven platform to synchronize the efforts of Congress and the executive branch. While the House passed 33 of the 42 priority bills in the Common Legislative Agenda, only around eight are directly related to the top three concerns of Filipinos. And only one has passed the Senate and will become law, which is debt condonation for farmers' debts. Ledac should intensify its focus on bills that are both important and urgent. An example would be reforming the military and uniformed personnel.

Mr. Marcos won the presidency by a landslide and, understandably, public expectations are high. While there have been some accomplishments, there are still many critical areas of improvement that need to be addressed immediately. Accordingly, our assessment of the administration's first year is satisfactory.

Our assessment of the government's performance next year for the government will likely improve if it embarks on a relentless focus on the topmost important and urgent national concerns of Filipinos and, especially, if it continuously utilizes Ledac to consolidate insights and accelerate the passage of pending reforms.

Gary B. Teves served as finance secretary under the Arroyo administration.



PUBLIC LIVES
RANDY DAVID

Randy David is away on travel.

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PH ready to face El Niño, says NIA chief

LEGAZPI CITY, Albay (PNA) — The head of the **National Irrigation Administration (NIA)** believes the country is ready to address the El Niño phenomenon in the coming months with the convergence of national government agencies.

At a press conference here on Friday, NIA administrator Eduardo Guillen said President Marcos' message on unity starts with the national government to remove parochial thinking.

"Lahat tulong-tulong ngayon. Ang gusto ng ating Pangulo, hindi na lang flood control ang ginagawa ng highways, kundi water management. So, in his mind, the best flood control project is water management. Pag umulan, bakit tayo kailangan bahain. Eh di maglagay na kayo ng retarding basin para siya na ang mag-apon ng tubig at i-release natin pag tag-araw. So, wala nang baha, meron tayong magamit na tubig ► 5

solar panels, tourism (When we build high dams, we have irrigation, power generation—not just flood control—aquaculture, solar panels can be put up at the lake, and it will also be good for tourism). All major river basin(s) must have high dams," he added.

Guillen also said the President wants farmers to value-add and maximize the value chain.

"The President wants the help inputs to the farmers given right and on-time. He wants before we release water, the farm inputs are already with the farmers," he said.

Guillen added that ₱200 billion in funding per year is needed to boost the country's agricultural inputs for farmers.

Albay 2nd District Rep. Joey Salceda, who chairs the House of Rep-

PH ready to face El Niño, says NIA chief 1◀

(Everyone helps one another now. What our President wants is not just flood control for the highways, but water management. So, in his mind the best flood control project is water management. When it rains, why do we have to be flooded? Why don't you put it in a retarding basin to collect water and let's release it during summer? So, there is no flood and we have usable water)," Guillen said.

He said the long-term solution for the El Niño phenomenon is creating high dams.

"Pag nagtayo tayo ng high dams, meron na tayo irrigation, meron ka na rin power generation, hindi lang yung flood control, aquaculture, the lake can be put up with

representatives Committee on Ways and Means, commended the initiatives and programs presented to them by Guillen.

"For the first time, in 27 years of my public service, I've seen a comprehensive, integrated, and advanced strategy for water. I've never seen a convergence that can work. So, if there is a convergence, money can be sourced out if the objectives are clear and the outcomes in terms of better lives for the people and more secure food for everyone," Salceda said.

He said the NIA administrator has the ears, and eyes of the President.

Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Elizaldy Co underscored the need for a master plan that would guide

the various government agencies in delivering better services.

"I think it is good that the regional directors of the different government agencies must have workshops to have a master plan," said Co, chair of the House Committee on Appropriations.

Guillen was in Legazpi City to meet with more than 200 irrigators associations (IA) in the region during the IA Congress at Hotel St. Ellis to relay the message of unity in the national government on how to improve the delivery of services to them.

"We want them to form cooperatives per town. Our irrigators' associations will have wider scope of assistance if they are registered as coop," he said.

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By **Richel V. Umel**
and **Ryan D. Rosauro**
@InqNational

KAUSWAGAN, LANAO DEL NORTE—At a recent visit by local and international sustainable agriculture experts here, organic farmer Aga Dimakuta shows off his verdant fields with diversified crops in Barangay Cayontor.

Dimakuta presented to the visitors a simple machine he fabricated that resembles a mortar weapon, fitted with a water hose. "But instead of bombarding [mortar shells], this lets off water and sprinkles it wide," Dimakuta jokingly explained to his visitors.

From what used to be idle lands, Dimakuta says Cayontor is now a thriving farming community, thanks to the local government's "From Arms to Farms" program.

The program, according to municipal planning and de-



From arms to farms

velopment coordinator Dione Fuentes, is for former Moro rebels and war-affected families, aiming to help them transition into productive civilian lives, and contribute to increasing local food production.

Of Kauswagan's 8,111-hectare land area, about 7,800 ha is classified as agricultural.

The program was set amid the town's strong push to rise from the ashes of the all-out war between government troops and Moro rebels in 2000, 2003 and 2008 which reopened old wounds from the violence that broke out in the early 1970s. The deep scars from the conflict left the town wallowing in poverty.

When former pilot and businessman Rommel Arnao assumed office as mayor in 2010, he focused on restoring the agriculture-dependent local economy which was then highly reliant on the fortunes of coconut farming.

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Local gov't support

Arnado said that early on, he realized that without sufficient food on the table of every household and without a dependable income stream, it would be impossible to talk about and build peace.

He said he chose to underpin this dream of progress and a break from decadeslong conflict

with organic farming because of its promise of sustaining the bounty of the soil and the natural resource base, in general, while also producing safe and healthy food. In addition, the low cost of inputs makes it attractive for cash-strapped farmers.

To indicate the local government's strong push for organic agriculture, the municipal council passed an ordinance declaring that this should be the only farming method adopted in the town, and also banned the sale

and use of toxic farm chemicals.

Arnado said there were pockets of resistance when they started out, but these were eventually overcome. To achieve greater scale, the Kauswagan local government even helped former Moro rebels in the nearby towns of Munai and Tangcal adopt organic agriculture as they set out to become farmers after turning their backs on rebellion.

Better lives

To encourage widespread farming, the local government deployed technicians to help out growers with their crops, distribute seeds and seedlings at subsidized cost and made available farm machinery and equipment to facilitate land preparation.

The local government also set out to rehabilitate the town's barangay roads in order to ease the transport of farm products to the market centers.

Today, some 13 years later, Arnado, who also leads the League of Organic Agriculture Municipalities, Cities and Provinces of the Philippines, takes pride in declaring that organ-

ic farming has taken root in 13 villages of this town of about 25,000 people.

Benjie Lucsadato, a former rebel commander, whose farm in Munai town also availed of the program's assistance, credits his foray into agricultural production for his family's economic uplift.

Lucsadato said his dream of having his children earn college degrees was realized through his earnings from farming. "It could not have happened had I not embraced organic farming," he said.

In Kauswagan's decadelong experience, the expansion of organic farming is both the cause and effect of conflict waning in the town—a virtuous cycle of peace bringing progress, and more progress further strengthening the gains of peace.

"During the days of conflict, it was impossible to talk about farming because from time to time we have to dodge bullets or even leave our homes and communities to escape [getting caught in the] crossfire," Dimakuta recalled.

Today, opportunities to earn from farming have also weaned

the youth away from banditry and the illegal drug trade, noted Lucsadato. "If there was no such opportunity, it would have been easy to lure them into these unlawful pursuits," he said.

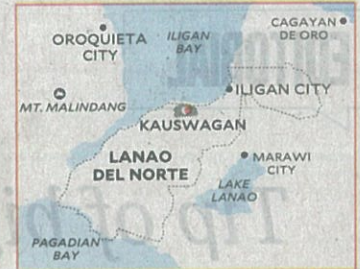
Arnado said it was the new social and economic condition that pushed firearms into irrelevance, emphasizing that in enrolling former rebels into the program, the local government did not set the surrender of weapons as a condition. "We only asked them to surrender their hearts," Arnado said.

Changing landscape

Bangsamoro parliament member Abdullah Macapaar, who commands a regional force of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front based in Lanao del Norte, said he wanted to replicate the program in former rebel communities.

A sample of crop production data illustrates the changing economic landscape.

In 2010, the town had 732 corn farmers tilling 953 ha of land and producing 3,336 metric tons annually. By 2018, production rose eight-fold to 30,000 MT, harvested from



KAUSWAGAN, LANAO DEL NORTE

SOURCE: Inquirer graphics
INC GRAPHICS

5,400 ha tended by 4,000 farmers.

The production of organic upland rice has grown 40 times, from only 75 MT in 2010 to 3,200 MT in 2018 as area cultivated



LEARNING HUB The 5-hectare Kauswagan International Organic Agriculture Convention Center is emerging as the new learning hub for sustainable agriculture in the country. It has recently hosted the gathering of some 1,200 local and international experts and practitioners of organic farming last month. — PHOTO COURTESY OF LANAO DEL NORTE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

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Organic agriculture brings bounty, peace to war-torn town in Lanao del Norte



HEALTHY GREENS A vendor (top left) tends to a booth full of fruits and vegetables at a trade fair held during the 6th Organic Asia Congress in Kauswagan, Lanao del Norte, last month. Kauswagan has slowly risen from its conflict-ridden past, thanks to organic agriculture that has been adopted even by schools that maintain vegetable gardens. —PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAUSWAGAN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

grew from 50 ha to 2,000 ha. Vegetable production also grew from 134 MT in 2010 to 950 MT in 2018 as the farming area expanded to 100 ha from only 6 ha.

The vibrant agriculture sector has contributed vastly to bringing down the incidence of poverty in the once war-torn town. From 49.5 percent in 2009, per small area estimate of poverty by the Philippine Statistics Authority, the poverty rate went down radically to 23.2 percent in 2018, or a decrease by more than half.

"More than 12 years ago, Kauswagan made the commitment to go all out in achieving peace and food security through organic agriculture. Today, the people are enjoying the great benefits of such efforts, achieving global goals for sustainable development," the International Federation of Organic Agricul-

ture Movement (Ifoam) noted.

As a tribute to its achievements, the local government received several honors, among them the 2014 Gawad Galing Pook Award and the 2016 Global Peace Prize of the United Cities and Local Governments.

Vic Anthony Tagupa of Ifoam-Asia describes Kauswagan as "the country's leading organic municipality."

It was for these reasons that Ifoam-Asia chose the town to host the 6th Organic Asia Congress last month with the theme "Building world peace through organic agriculture: Food security vital to peace building."

"Kauswagan is an embodiment of what can be done and what has to be done. And we need to remember [that] these actions of peacebuilding were undertaken under the banner of organic agriculture," said Ifoam-Asia president Matthew John.

"This is exactly what we need at these times of armed and political conflict—to reaffirm once again the principles of organic agriculture—for a better world. And Kauswagan is a living example of these values," John added. **INQ**