LAUNCHING OF JOINT MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT INTITIATIVE PHASE II (JMDI II) PROJECT IN NAGA CITY

BICOL REGION GETS PROJECT TO BOOST MIGRATION'S CONTRIBUTION TO INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Naga City, Philippines, 22 April– A global programme on migration and development goes local.

With five percent of total Filipino migrant population coming from the region, Bicol is selected as one of the Philippine project sites for the Joint Migration and Development Initiative (JMDI) Phase II. The global programme, financed by the European Union and Switzerland and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, aims to localize and mainstream migration and development (M&D) among local governments.

Among others, the project will establish migration resource centers in the Bicol region. These resource centers will serve as one-stop hubs for services and projects for overseas Filipinos and their families. These centers will also help generate investments to provide Bicolanos with alternative economic options apart from overseas work.

As one of the main source cities of Filipino overseas migrants in the region, the local city government of Naga will be leading this initiative. Starting with the Regional Forum on Migration and Development from 21-23 April, the city government will mentor at least 15 local government units in preparing their local development and investment plan that will integrate policies that maximize potentials of migration.

During the launch, Mayor John D. Bongat revealed his vision “of making Naga City the center for programs and services for Bicolano migrants.” He added that “we are currently negotiating with relevant agencies such as the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in building the Migration Resource Center right where our bus and jeepney hubs are to make it very accessible to our clientele.”

With a City Advisory Committee on Overseas Filipinos established in 2011, Naga has included migration and development in its 10-year
Comprehensive Development Plan (2011-2020). An estimated 103,000 overseas Filipinos come from Bicol. Apart from Naga, the top source cities or municipalities of migrants include Legaspi, Daet, Iriga and Nabua.

“With this project, we will not only build strong public structure that is of service to migrants but a stronger family when both parents choose not to migrate because economic opportunities are already available at home,” said Bicol 3rd District Representative Leni Gerona Robredo.

European Union Ambassador to the Philippines, Guy Ledoux underlined that “Migration provides complex challenges and real opportunities for Europe and the Philippines alike. What we have certainly learnt is that cooperation between local authorities and civil society partners is necessary for the success and sustainability of migration and development initiatives.”

“Local government units are important actors in JMDI because they create the enabling environment and other conditions in order to encourage overseas Filipinos to save and invest and eventually return to their hometowns. This can be done through passage of local legislations or plans that would integrate migration in their development agenda. Investment plans with corresponding incentives should be available for migrants and their families,” remarked Ambassador of Switzerland to the Philippines, Ivo Sieber.

Present during the launching are the Country Director of UNDP, Maurice Dewulf, Chairperson of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, Secretary Imelda Nicolas, and officers of the Bicol League of Cities and Urban Municipalities.

More than 70 representatives from Bicol LGUs, regional government agencies, academe and civil society participated in the 3-day regional forum. With three workshops covering topics such as how to tap government agencies in promoting M&D and how M&D can be promoted in the local areas, the participants considered financial literacy training for both migrants overseas and their families back home as critical. Data availability or migration profile is also important particularly for planning and responsive policy formulation.

Funded by the European Union and Switzerland through its Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the project is being implemented in the Philippines by the UNDP in joint partnership with IOM, ILO, UNFPA, UN Women, and UNHCR, and with the Commission on Filipinos Overseas as the
main government partner. A budget of US$230,000 (PHP10 million) is provided for the project until January 2016.

In Bicol region, the local government of Naga will implement the project together with the National Economic and Development Authority, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Associates in Research and Community Empowerment Services and Ateneo de Naga University.

Aside from Bicol, the project will also cover Region IV-A (Calabarzon), which is the top source region of migrants next to the National Capital Region. Region IV-A has a Committee on Migration and Development under its Regional Development Council established in 2010.

The Philippines remains to be a major source country of migrants with more than 10 million of its citizens working and living in over 200 countries. The US$23 billion (PHP 1 trillion) worth of remittances of Filipino migrants in 2013 has made the Philippines the third largest recipient of foreign remittances behind India and China, and in the same ranking as Mexico. An estimated 20% of all Filipino households receive remittances. JMDI supports the government’s goal in achieving inclusive growth by harnessing the potential of these remittances to generate the multiplier effect in the economy.

As a global programme, JMDI II is being implemented in Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Nepal and the Philippines, with a fund of USD 9.5 million (PHP 430 million) for three years to promote the contribution of migration for development at the local level and with the strong participation of local or regional government units.