

The Development of Eastern Visayas: Issues and Concerns

CESARIO R. TORRES

“Of what good is democracy if it is not for the poor?”

— Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos

I

The challenge of national development confronts all Third World nations today. In the quest for this elusive goal, societies are restructured overnight. In societies where the leaders are incapable of responding appropriately to the incessant clamor for more food, clothing, shelter, education, health and medical services, violent upheavals usually ensue. The social classes who bear the brunt of continued poverty inevitably resort to violent means to redress what is perceived as an iniquitous social, economic, is to respond adequately to what President Marcos calls “the rebellion of the poor.”

But what is development? Never in the history of man has this concept become so common as it is today. In the Philippines as in all other countries of the Third World, the passion to develop is at the core of all societal efforts. It is the overriding goal of all political, educational, economic and social institutions. It is as a matter of fact, the *raison d’etre* of the New Society. Thus, President Marcos, in an address to the workers of the Philippines delivered in 1 May 1973, stated that:

The real object of our efforts — the struggle for development and growth, the establishment of a new society, the restructuring of our economic, social and political institutions — all of these are for one purpose alone, the uplift of the Filipino common man.

In contemporary development literature, development is often equated with Westernization or modernization. To Daniel Lerner and

The writer is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, College of Arts and Sciences, University of the Philippines.

Samuel Huntington, for instance, a developed society possesses the essential characteristics of industrial, socially open, innovating and democratic. Another Western writer, Saul Katz, conceives development as "a major societal change from one state of national well-being to another, more valued, state."

To Denis Goulet, development is providing meaning to life itself which can be described as "maturation," "humanization," or "qualitative ascent" of human societies. It is both a goal and a process to improve the quality of life of the people. In short, to use the words of Ocampo and Johnson, "development involves the liberation of man from conditions of exploitation and oppression."

But whatever the ideological orientation of any development writer or theorist, it is more or less accepted that the process of development is complex and comprehensive, encompassing the totality of society itself—its culture, its political system, its economy.

As a total process, it is therefore societal in scope. Hence, Hans Blaise would conceive development as a process pertaining to those changes in a society's patterns of values structures, and action; those increments in social and physical technology which will lead to a more efficient utilization of the society's resources, and ultimately contribute to greater social welfare.

The books and learned publications dealing with development and underdevelopment are legion. Development theorists all over the world continue to engage in heated debate as to the appropriate societal strategies that should be adopted by developing states in order to provide the basic necessities as food, clothing, shelter, medical and health services, and human dignity. In the Third World, the debate is far from settled. If ever, it has become more intense and acrimonious.

However, despite the plethora of concepts and ideas concerning the correct national development strategies to be followed by developing societies all over the Third World, such concepts and ideas can be subsumed under the rubric of three broad categories. They are: (1) capitalism and liberal democracy, (2) socialism, and (3) the theory of dependency.

Within the context of the capitalist and liberal democratic tradition of the United States and Europe, development and underdevelopment are explained in terms of several dimensions and criteria. It is contended that underdevelopment is a historical process through which all societies must pass before they can attain the utopia, or in the words of Walt Restow, the stage of "high mass consumption."

In this development framework, the poor countries of the world are continually bombarded with a litany of their national weaknesses ranging from their traditional, familistic, ethnic, and regionalistic political culture which are the causes of corruption, nepotism, lack of achievement motivation, inequality, economic stagnation, and poverty. Because of these weaknesses, the economy is not rationally organized, there is a perennial lack of capital, labor is unskilled, research and development highly pathetic, and so on and so forth. There is then a never-ending cycle of poverty-disease-poverty—a vicious cycle from which the Third World countries cannot seem to escape from despite massive influx of exogenous capital funds, technology, not to mention cultural imperialism.

Development theorists of this type pontificate on the eternal validity of capitalism as the ultimate economic system and on individualism as the pillar of the ultimate social order.

Unfortunately, it appears that this type of developmental strategy may have been found inappropriate by some poor countries of the world. Consequently, there seems to be an increasing fascination in the Third World with Marxist socialism or “development socialism” in the words of Helio Jaguaribe, as a model in the struggle for national development and liberation.

In essence, development and underdevelopment are explained in terms of a historical-deterministic framework wherein the mode of production and distribution of goods and services of the economy would determine the superstructure of society—its government, culture, education, and so forth. Continued poverty is explained in terms of capitalism and imperialism, in terms of exploitation and oppression by the ruling elite of their own people—by colonizing their own people, in the words of Ortega y Gasset. Perhaps, partly in fascination with the Phenomenal changes that have taken place in such socialist states as Soviet Russia and China, some Third World countries have opted to follow this historical-determinist framework as a model of development.

A third group of development writers known as the *dependencia* theorists whose intellectual inspirations are Marx and Lenin, postulates that the poverty of the Third World countries is a function of what is known as the center-periphery relationship or the metropolis-satellite tandem. Dependence is the relationship of one underdeveloped society with a more developed country whereby the latter's economy dominates that of the former. More specifically, Antonios Karam states: “Country A is economically dependent upon

country B, and country B is economically dominant upon country A, if decisions and actions taken in country A have no critical effect upon country B, while similar decisions and actions taken in country B have a critical impact upon country A."

To the *dependencia* theorists, therefore, the underdevelopment of the Third World is a function of the development of the First World. The poor countries are poor because the rich countries of the world siphon the resources--the wealth of the developing countries--through an intricate system of economic, political, and social relationships which are presently manifested in the multi-national corporations and other economic ventures. In the words of one of its foremost . . . advocates, Theotonio dos Santos, the multi-national corporations are the instruments of the developed countries to continue their "industrial-technological dominance" over the poor countries of the world. The centers or metropolises could be the industrial giants of the West including Japan and the Soviet Union and the periphery, the underdeveloped countries of the world.

In the underdeveloped countries themselves, there are also center-periphery or metropolis-satellite relationships. The centers and metropolises are the hubs of development, modernization, wealth, or what have you. These are the primate cities such as Manila or Cebu. Correspondingly, the peripheries or satellites are the countrysides, the depressed regions of such countries whose resources--physical, human, and financial--are siphoned to the national centers and metropolises, eventually ending up in the dominant countries.

As a framework for analysis, the theory of dependency provides exciting possibilities. In Latin America where it has sunk its roots and is presently growing vibrantly, *dependencia* has created so much enthusiasm among Latin American nationalists and intellectuals who until now, are confronted with the stark reality that the quality of life of the masses there has not appreciably improved since the days of the *conquistadores*.

In the Philippines, there is so much to command the theory of dependency as a framework for the analysis of Philippine society, including, or course, the Eastern Visayas region.

II

The Eastern Visayas is one of the most depressed or developing regions of the Philippines, itself one of the most depressed or developing countries of the Third World. The Philippines--in relation

to the United States, Japan, and possibly the countries of Western Europe—is certainly a dependent country, at the moment. Following the analytical framework of Antonios Karam, it is not necessary to provide a mass of empirical data to conclude that, indeed, the decisions and actions taken by the Philippines have no critical effects on the United States, Japan, and the countries of the European Economic Community. On the other hand, the decisions and actions taken by these countries with respect to the Philippines can shake our society down to its very foundations.

What then are the implications of these assumptions on the “issues and concerns” regarding the development of Eastern Visayas? What are the issues? And what are the concerns?

In support of our contention that the Eastern Visayas—comprising the provinces and cities in the islands of Leyte and Samar—is indeed underdeveloped, the following issues or statistical data, if you will, are presented.

In 1973, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) came out with a comparative development index of all provinces in the Philippines. As illustrated in Figure 1, the provinces in the region were way below that of Rizal and Cebu. With Rizal province as the index, i.e., 100 Leyte was then roughly situated at point 22 and the Samar provinces at about point 18.

Indeed, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, the gross domestic product as well as the per capita output of the Eastern Visayas, in comparison to the other regions of the Philippines, point to an irrefutable conclusion that the region is indeed underdeveloped.

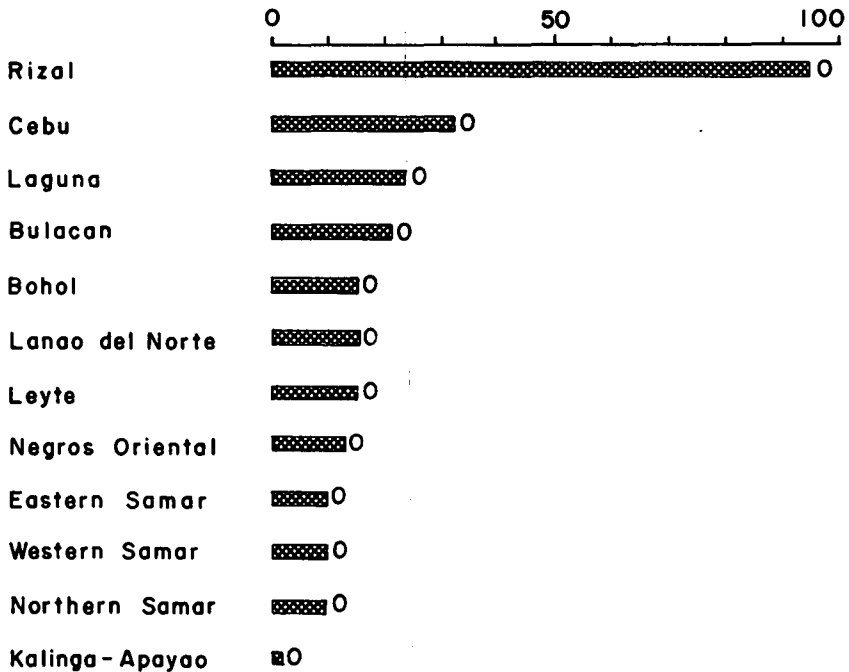
In both the gross domestic product and the regional per capita output, the Eastern Visayas belongs to the bottom group of the entire Philippines. The per capita output of ₱935 in 1977 is only a little more than one-fifth that of Metro Manila and one-half that of the national average for the same year.

Because of the uneven distribution of income in our country, the Eastern Visayas, together with Southern Mindanao, had in the words of NEDA, “the largest absolute number of . . . low income people” and that the incident of poverty “is more pronounced” in the Eastern Visayas next only to the Cagayan Valley and followed by the Ilocos and Bicol regions.

In terms of labor productivity, the national average stood at ₱4,704 per worker in 1975. For the same year, labor productivity in the Eastern Visayas was only ₱2,326.

Low labor productivity, low per capita output, and lack of economic enterprises obviously result in inadequate income for a vast

Figure 1
 COMPARATIVE DEVELOPMENT INDEX
 (Rizal Province = 100)



Source: Modified from *Regional Development Projects, FY 1974-77* (Manila: National Economic Development Authority, 1973), p. 15.

majority of the population in the Region. Consequently, some 85 per cent of the total number of families had to exist on an annual income of less than ₱4,000 while only one per cent was earning ₱15,000 and above. Clearly, the disparity in income between the elites and the masses in the Region is disturbing.

In terms of medical services, Region VIII also suffers from inadequate medical and health services. This can be gleaned from the relatively high—second highest, in fact—rate of mortality in the Region. Last year alone, schistosomiasis was a leading cause of deaths in the Region. In comparison with the national average of 64 deaths per 1,000 population, the mortality rate in Eastern Visayas stood at 75 per 1,000 in 1975. The infant mortality rate is even higher.

Table 1. Regional Gross Domestic Product, 1975 (In million pesos at constant 1972 prices)

Regions	Level	% of Distribution
PHILIPPINES	68056	100.0
LUZON	43826	64.4
Region I	3162	4.6
Region II	1774	2.6
Region III	5413	8.0
Region IV (MMA)	25532	34.6
Region IV-A	7376	10.8
Region V	2569	3.8
VISAYAS	13051	19.2
Region VI	6731	9.9
Region VII	4238	6.2
Region VIII	2082	3.1
MINDANAO	11179	16.4
Region IX	2073	3.1
Region X	2653	3.9
Region XI	4581	6.7
Region XII	1867	2.7

Source: NEDA.

Table 2. Regional Per Capita Output, 1973, 1975, 1977 (In thousands of pesos)

REGION	1973	% to MMA	1975	% to MMA	1977	% to MMA
PHILIPPINES	1525	38.2	1601	35.5	1734	38.7
LUZON	1751	43.9	1911	42.3	2034	45.5
Region I	961	24.1	955	21.2	1068	23.9
Region II	934	23.4	917	20.3	1072	24.0
Region III	1129	28.3	1300	28.8	1379	30.8
Region IV (MMA)	3988	100.0	4515	100.0	4474	100.0
Region IV-A	1507	37.8	1529	33.9	1691	37.9
Region V	800	20.1	791	17.5	906	20.3
VISAYAS	1315	33.0	1333	29.5	1484	33.4
Region VI	1712	42.9	1728	38.3	1933	43.2
Region VII	1229	30.8	1257	27.8	1405	31.4
Region VIII	818	20.5	825	18.3	935	20.9
MINDANAO	1206	30.2	1141	25.3	1273	28.5
Region IX	852	21.3	928	20.6	1014	22.7
Region X	1238	31.0	1098	24.3	1275	28.5
Region XI	1750	43.9	1629	36.1	1769	39.5
Region XII	874	21.9	800	17.7	905	20.2

Source: NEDA.

It stood at 630 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to the national average of 476. Table 3 illustrates this situation.

Table 3. Regional Mortality, Live Births and Infant Mortality rates, 1975 (In percent)

Regions	Mortality (per 1000 population)	Live births (per 1000 population)	Infant Mortality (per 1000 live births)
PHILIPPINES	6.4	28.2	47.58
LUZON	7.0	31.7	47.76
Region I	7.6	32.2	44.02
Region II	7.4	31.8	55.58
Region III	6.1	30.6	41.47
Region IV ^a	6.8	33.3	47.62
Region V	7.2	30.4	49.59
VISAYAS	7.8	24.3	58.87
Region VI	7.1	21.8	65.84
Region VII	7.8	30.8	47.86
Region VIII	7.5	20.3	62.91
MINDANAO	4.1	22.6	42.74
Region IX	4.3	14.8	60.34
Region X	5.2	29.1	39.93
Region XI	4.6	32.7	30.98
Region XII	2.3	12.8	39.73

^aIncludes Region IV-A.

Source: NEDA

Malnutrition is one of the more serious problems of the people in the Eastern Visayas. As reported by the regional office of the Ministry of Health in its Operation *Timbang*, among the preschoolers in Region VIII, only 19.48 per cent have normal weight. The rest suffer from first degree malnutrition; 26.75 per cent, second degree malnutrition; and 7.4 per cent suffer from third degree (the serious case) of malnutrition.

As an indicator to determine the degree of development and modernization, the literacy rate is an acceptable operational variable. In the case of the Eastern Visayas, again, in comparison with other regions of the country, the literacy rate is below the national average. In 1976, among the five provinces in the Region, Samar had the highest literacy rate, followed by Southern Leyte, Leyte, Eastern Samar, and at the bottom was Northern Samar where a State

University, the University of Eastern Philippines, is located. The regional literacy rate was 77.6 per cent. In the same year, the national average was 87 per cent. The rate in Metro Manila was 97 per cent.

Given this state of regional affairs, it is not surprising, therefore, that in the words of the NEDA regional office, "out-migration is very high among the younger bracket of the population, such as the 15-29 years old age group."

For the decade 1960-70 alone more than 200,000 outmigrated from the region. This represents a drain of 22.7 per cent of the regional labor force.

This is only to be expected. Since there is a dire lack of opportunities for personal advancement, the young and the discontented, feeling helpless in such a situation are constrained to move out and seek "greener pastures" in other, more progressive centers of the archipelago, like Cebu or Manila. This is, indeed, a big loss to the Region considering the fact that most of those who out-migrate could be the ones who sincerely are concerned about the Region and may have the skills and the commitment to assist in the process of regional development.

Consequently, the region had only population growth rate of 1.7 in 1975 in comparison to the 2.86 for the entire Philippines for the same year. This slow growth rate does not indicate that the "warays" are less romantic or prolific than their compatriots in other regions of the country. The fact is that a great percentage of the Leytaños and Samareños migrate to the centers and metropolises of the Philippines to seek a better quality of life. Unfortunately, most of these migrants end up in the peripheries of such centers congregating as squatters and ultimately ending up in the resettlement areas of Carmona, Sapang Palay and other squatter resettlement projects.

Indeed, the situation can be pathetic.

We can go on *ad infinitum*. The facts and figures on the under-development of the Region could be inexhaustible. But that would be superfluous. Only the incorrigible skeptic and those with jaundiced eyes would demand for more proof to be convinced that the masses of Eastern Visayas are not in a state of peace and tranquility. They are poor and exploited whose consciousness, in the words of President Marcos, "permeates them with a profound sense of being oppressed, and not simply because the rich oppress them brazenly but because it is *poverty* itself that oppresses them. To be poor is to be *without*, and therefore to *be* an *outsider* in the vibrant

and meaningful political, economic, and social life of modern human community.

And with his sense of history, the President adds: "Above all, being poor is being invisible; violence makes them visible." The prophetic ring of this rhetoric is now unfolding in the mountains and jungles of Samar!

III

Why is this so? Why is the Eastern Visayas "the most disadvantaged region," in the words of the NEDA? Why is poverty so pervasive in the Region that it can stultify the minds of the people? The Region is not poor. It is rich in mineral resources. It has magnetite iron, sand, copper, manganese, and bentonite. Asphalt is aplenty in Southern Leyte. Iron, pyrites, gold and manganese are found in Samar. There might even be bauxite in the region. Fish abound in the surrounding seas.

There is abundant rainfall; and agriculture has a tremendous/potential. The vast plains of Leyte and Samar, if cultivated scientifically, can provide the rice needs of the entire Visayas. Commercial cross such as coconuts, corn and abaca thrive well in the Region; other agricultural crops can also be grown.

With the restructuring of the Philippine political system in 1972, various developmental strategies were formulated. Thus in the Four-Year Development Plan for 1974-77 of the NEDA, regional development and industrialization were one of the six objectives of the plan. The others were: equitable distribution of wealth and income, expanding employment opportunities, promoting social development, stabilizing price levels, and accelerating economic growth.

Under the umbrella of this plan as well as the succeeding plans, a variety of developmental projects were laid out and initially implemented for the Region especially in Leyte. The Samar-Leyte portion of the Pan-Philippine Highway was diligently constructed. Ports, harbors, and other physical infrastructure were parts of the blueprints.

To develop sources of energy, the Tongenon Geothermal plant was assiduously developed. Today it is envisioned to supply the power need so the copper smelting plant to be established in North-western Leyte, which, incidentally, was vigorously opposed by the people in San Juan, Batangas because of its potential danger to the environment.

An integrated development program to combat schistosomiasis and at the same time develop the agricultural potentials of the schisto-infested swamps of Leyte was formulated with the establishment of the Sab-a Basin Development Authority. In Samar, an integrated development project was launched with financing from the World Bank.

In the field of social infrastructure, the UP College Tacloban was established after so many years of urgent requests. The Visayan Agricultural College in Leyte became a state college of agriculture and was provided with generous funding from the World Bank and the Philippine government. In addition, other regional schools, such as the Leyte Normal School, became state colleges. They too were provided generous support. But the concentration of these projects are in Leyte. They are not rationally distributed throughout the Region:

One may well ask: With all those massive inputs into the Eastern Visayas, how come the Region is still the third most depressed region in the country?

Admittedly, these development projects are recent. Their impact may not have been felt yet. In some cases, only the foundations have been laid. The benefits, if any, have yet to seep down to the masses.

But the more fundamental question that we could ask and should concern us is this: Considering the international situation where the First World is apparently oblivious of the plight of the Third World, and considering further that the First World may be unrelenting in its determination to continue its domination of the Third World through numerous political, economic and cultural ties, can the developmental projects that are now being implemented throughout the Philippines and the Eastern Visayas guarantee the liberation of the masses from the bondage of poverty, exploitation, and oppression? Would not these projects reinforce the rapid process of denationalization to the detriment of Philippine national interest?

These are indeed disturbing questions. Because within the context of dependency theory, if a dependent nation-state cannot muster the sufficient political will to smash the bonds that tie it to the dominant nation-states, then the massive infrastructure programs, integrated development projects, unlimited funding for educational institutions even if some of these are associated with the University of the Philippines which is well-known for its tradition of intense nationalism—all of these will be for naught. Without an ideological

orientation that is based on the need of the masses and an understanding that the elites of a region or a dependent nation are intimately linked to the elites of dominant states, the first-class roads and bridges, the schools, the factories, etc., instead of liberating the people, could become instruments for their continued subjection.

The roads and harbors may be used to ferry out our irreplaceable natural resources, the schools could become forums for the dissemination of alien cultures and ideas, and the factories—instead of providing livelihood to the people—could destroy the environment.

In the final analysis, development is not a simple process of introducing massive financial inputs into an anemic economy. It involves the entire society: its educational system, its civil servants as well as the military bureaucracy, the executives and administrators of the national groups, as well as civic and social organizations. Development, be it national in scope or regional in context, impinges on a broad political, social, economic, administrative, and international spectrum. It encompasses several dimensions. In short, it strikes at the actual capability of a social system to solve problems and sustain change within an ideological framework of Filipinism and economic and social equity.

The interaction of the conference participants, their insights, and the consensus that can emerge in this conference can become important inputs into the processes of national policy decision making in addition to providing the regional decision makers and administrators in invaluable data source for their immediate and long-range programs of regional development and modernization. We can do no less.

To fail our people in their incessant demand for adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical services, and human dignity would be catastrophic. It can ignite a national conflagration which can culminate in a bloody national trauma searing our very souls and consciousness.

And in that eventuality, no amount of futuristic studies can prevent what may well be an historical imperative.