

# The Regional Development Council as a Mechanism for Coordination and Effective Performance: Focus on Region II

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*The importance of the role of local governments in the planning and implementation of national development programs has led to the formation of coordinative mechanisms that would transform these into effective instruments for development. The Regional Development Council (RDC) is one of the mechanisms tasked with coordinating the government's plans and programs in a particular area. Based on a study of Region II RDC, however, it is concluded that coordinative capacity and actual coordinative performance of the RDC have generally been weak, and as a consequence, have been less effective. It is recommended, therefore, that RDCs be strengthened particularly in terms of resources, authority and capable technical staffs if these are to function as coordinative mechanisms for the planning and implementation of development programs and projects.*

## Introduction

Area development councils represent the government's latest integrated approach to development. These are mechanisms designed to synchronize the planning as well as the implementation of the development efforts in a specific geographic area. Composed of local leaders and the representatives of different national government agencies and local government operating in that territory, the development council likewise serves as a forum of communication among them. As such, development councils arouse interest chiefly in terms of two main factors: the potential and actual levels of coordination they may exhibit, and the extent of development they can effect.

This paper is part of a larger study attempting to examine the various facets of coordination and effectiveness of development councils. The original project covered all sub-national levels — region, province, and municipality.<sup>1</sup> Because of space limitations, findings on the councils at all these levels cannot be reported here. Instead, this paper focuses on what many consider to be the most important level of all, the region. As a further limitation, we have examined the working of a development council only in Region II, the Cagayan Valley, northernmost region of the country.

Two primary reasons prompted this area's selection: (1) it has one of the

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<sup>1</sup>See Alex B. Brillantes, Jr., "Development Councils as Coordinating Mechanisms for the Planning and Implementation of Development Programs and Projects: Focus on Region II" (unpublished Master's thesis, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines, 1979).

relatively more active Regional Development Councils (RDCs); and (2) the Cagayan Valley has been officially recognized by the Government as a depressed region: thus, if the Region II RDC and the lower-level development councils in this region prove to be effective in spite of the region's depressed conditions, then it may be safe to hypothesize that leading regions may fare just as well or even better.

### *The Significance of the Regional Level*

The focus on the regional level can be justified on two grounds. First, the regional development council, among all area councils, covers the most extensive territory, and should thus be able to maintain certain economies of scale while strengthening the desire of the government to allow for authoritative decision-making and action away from the center. Second, the region is considered in government circles today, not only as the administrative level that it is now, but more importantly, as a main tier for power devolution as a new local government level in the future. No less than the NEDA foresees it as the nucleus in the evolution and eventual creation of the regional government. Thus, the RDC's present performance as a coordinating body will surely be used as a benchmark in determining its capacity to perform its future role in the organization of another tier of local government, the regional government. As a matter of fact, with the activation of the *Sangguniang Pampook* (Regional Legislative Assembly) in Regions IX and XII (on June 27, 1979) as part of the government's efforts to bring peace to these war-

torn Mindanao regions, the first move towards the creation of the regional government has already been set into motion.<sup>2</sup>

Regional Development Councils (RDCs) have been organized in each of the country's 13 administrative regions. This was in accordance with Part VII of the Integrated Reorganization Plan (Presidential Decree (P.D.) No. 1) as operationalized by Letter of Implementation (L.O. Imp.) No. 22. These documents state that the RDC is an extension of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and is responsible for maintaining "close coordination with the sectoral departments (ministries) of the national government and the local governments within the region." The NEDA Regional Office serves as the technical staff of the RDC.

### *Brief Historical Review*

Government efforts to undertake regional development in the Philippines date back to 1950 when President Quirino signed Executive Order (E.O.) No. 367 establishing the National Planning Commission vested with regional planning functions. However, no general plans for the regional areas were actually accomplished by this Commission.

<sup>2</sup>However, the RDCs of these two regions continue to exist as mechanisms for coordination among the national line agencies and local governments in the area. When the *Lupong Tagapaganap ng Pook* (Regional Executive Council) has convened, and when these two new bodies have been institutionalized as the executive and legislative arms of the regional government, the RDCs may be said to have performed their useful role and may eventually be abolished or phased out. Such sequence of events may be followed and repeated in the rest of the country's eleven regions.

In 1954, the Government Survey and Reorganization Commission (GSRC), created in accordance with Republic Act (R.A.) No. 997 was ordered to conduct a thorough study of the Executive Branch of the Government and to formulate recommendations to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of government. Among the plans submitted by the GSRC was Reorganization Plan No. 53-A concerning field operations which introduced the concept of dividing the country into several regions in order to provide greater uniformity and standardization in the decentralization of government functions. However, the regional delineation advocated by the GSRC was not strictly followed by the different agencies implementing the plan.

The creation of development authorities and regional planning boards in the sixties' represented more definite attempts at regional planning and development.

With the declaration of martial law in 1972, the Integrated Reorganization Plan (IRP) came into effect. A significant provision of the IRP concerned the division of the country into eleven (later increased to 13) regions to be uniformly followed as much as possible by all agencies of the national government when implementing their regionalization scheme. The IRP declared it a policy to promote the socio-economic development of the regions by regional development and planning within the context of national and local plan-

ning.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the regions as geographic areas have become one of the major focal points of development.<sup>4</sup>

### Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This study looks at the interrelationship of three main variables: coordinative capacity, actual coordinative performance, and effectiveness of the development council. The first two are facets of coordination, one focusing on potential, the other on the translation of capacity into action. Together they are hypothesized to affect the performance of the development council in planning and implementing programs and projects in its geographic area of responsibility.

The interrelationship of these variables was determined through (1) a content analysis of the council's documents gathered during the October 1978 and January 1979 field visits which included the minutes of their meetings from November 1974 to January 1979 and (2) interviews conducted with selected key officials of the RDC such as the RDC chairman and governor of Isabela, the NEDA Regional Executive Director, the governors

<sup>3</sup>It is in pursuance of this policy that Regional Development Authorities (RDAs) were to be created. However, the RDAs were never operationalized, and only the RDCs were activated.

<sup>4</sup>However, it has been observed by some sectors that some regions as constituted and delineated by the IRP have not been suitable areas for planning. Thus, the concept of sub-regional planning areas by focusing development efforts on a smaller area within the region has been introduced. Examples of such an approach are the river basin approach, the island development approach, the provincial development approach, and the municipal development or the integrated area development (IAD) approach which groups together several contiguous municipalities for development purposes.

of Cagayan, Quirino, and Ifugao, the Regional Directors of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD) and Ministry of Public Works (MPW), the President of the Regional Mayors League and the Chairman of the Association of Barangay Captains.

Since the RDC of Region II is one of the more active RDCs, it has been chosen as the site of this study. It is also one area with vast potential waiting to be developed. The region as described by the Cagayan Valley (Region II) *Five-Year Development Plan*<sup>5</sup>

consists of the seven provinces of Batanes, Cagayan, Ifugao, Isabela, Kalinga-Apayao, Nueva Viscaya, and Quirino occupying the northeastern most portion of Luzon. Occupying more than 12 per cent of the total Philippine land area, the region contained only 4.6 per cent of the total population in 1975, making it the *least populated* among the regions of the country.

Region II is currently among the regions that are worse-off. . . But the *region's resources are vast and promising* enough to allow reasonable expectations of growth given the necessary support. Region II is second to the biggest region in the Philippines. . .

#### (Region II)

Thus, it is believed that if this region would be able to implement the RDC concept despite its depressed conditions, then leading regions may fare just as well, perhaps, even better.

Other reasons Cagayan Valley was chosen as the focus of the study include the institutional linkages (such as the conduct of training for the local officials) the UP College of Public Administration (where this

researcher is working) has with the Isabela Provincial Government of which the RDC Chairman is the Governor. These linkages have facilitated the gathering of data for this study.

Coordination has been defined in the study simply as a process whereby the efforts of the individuals in a group are harmonized in order to obtain unity of action towards the achievement of a common objective. It has two major types, namely, vertical and horizontal.

Vertical coordination is achieved through the line of command, both within the structure of the office itself (internal) or up to the ministerial or higher levels of the governmental hierarchy (external). On the other hand, horizontal coordination is attained not through the line of command but through the coordinative relations among the various national line agencies (which are sector-oriented) and local governments (which are area-oriented) operating and rendering services in a common geographical area such as the region, province, city, municipality or barangay, and serving the same clientele. The focus of this study was horizontal coordination as brought about by the development council.

Coordinative capacity was measured in relation to the major elements of coordination. These are: (1) a common goal or purpose; (2) an organizational structure; and (3) built-in servo-mechanisms or control mechanisms.

These were operationalized using the following major indicators:

- (1) The *perception* among the

<sup>5</sup>Cagayan Valley (Region II), *Five Year Development Plan 1978-1982*, Tuguegarao, Philippines, September 1977, p. 3. (Italics supplied.)

members regarding commonality of goals: the council's capacity to coordinate becomes stronger as the members begin to perceive common goals;

- (2) The *leadership* of the development council: the stronger the leadership of the council, the greater is its coordinative capacity. And corollary to the preceding indicator, the stronger the members perceive the leadership, the greater is its coordinative capacity;
- (3) The *authority* of the council primarily over the allocation of funds for development programs and projects and the corresponding authority to determine the development priorities of the area. This also includes the development council's authority over the personnel movement of its members. The development council's capacity to coordinate is strengthened when it is vested with sufficient legal authority over such matters; and corollarily, the more the council actually exercises and asserts its authority, the greater is its coordinative capacity;
- (4) Finally, the presence or absence of a supporting *technical staff* to perform the preliminary studies for the development council and to monitor its actions and decisions: the council's capacity to coordinate is strengthened depending on the availability of a technical staff manned by qualified personnel.

The second variable is identified here, following the terminology of

the United Nations Center for Regional Development as the "ways of coordination." They include:

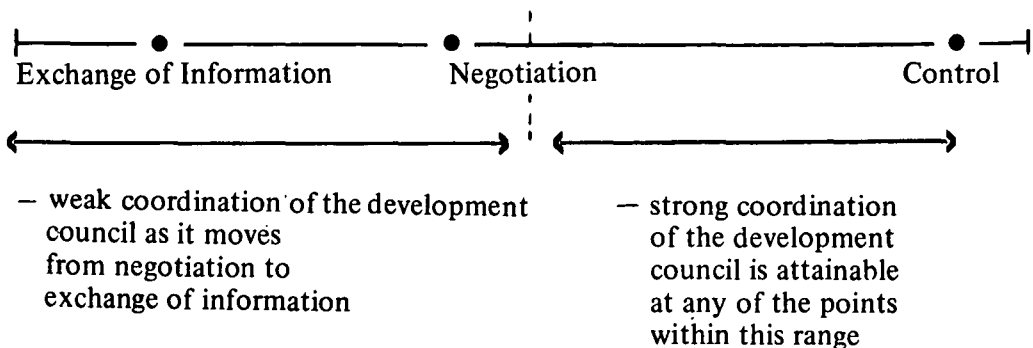
- (1) Coordination through *exchange of information*. Described as the weakest form of coordination, this means that the development council simply serves as a communication link-up or a forum for dialogue and exchange of information among the members who may either be sector- or area-oriented.
- (2) Coordination through *negotiation*. The development council here is described as a "broker" of interests, and as a referee or "mediator" during conflicts. As a result, compromises among the members whose interests may conflict are readied and consensus is arrived at.
- (3) Coordination through *control*. This means that the development council is vested with certain specific powers to effect the desired coordination in the area. Its authority is sanctioned by law and it may enforce certain policies and rules with the corresponding coercive measures.

Such ways of coordination may be plotted in a continuum, with coordination through exchange of information at one extreme and coordination through control at the other end. Coordination through negotiation may be described as the "middle of the road" way of coordination.

In trying to find out the way of coordination, this study considered the following: (1) the proportion of administrative and substantive matters

discussed in RDC meetings; (2) the proportion of inter-sectoral and inter-areal matters which the RDC decided; and (3) the extent of collective executive action carried out in the region following RDC decisions. The study considered each of these three indicators separately and gave them equal weights and consideration.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the weights of each of the indicators were taken as a whole to determine the development council's way of coordination.

This implies that as the point indicating the way of coordination in the continuum moves to the right, (i.e., from exchange of information towards the points after negotiation), the development council's coordination is strengthened. However, this should not be taken to mean that the point of control defines the area of strongest coordination. On the contrary, strong coordination can be attained at any of the points within the range starting with the points after "negotiation" up to the point of "control." This is graphically illustrated below:



<sup>6</sup>It was recognized that a composite indicator could have been devised. But for purposes of this study and due to the input-orientedness of the indicators being used, it was deemed better to first consider the indicators separately, since a weakness in one indicator may be offset by a strength in another.

As mentioned at the outset, *effectiveness* is the dependent variable: the stronger the coordinative capacity and actual coordinative performance, the more effective it is; conversely, the weaker the coordination, the less effective.

The degree and extent of *goal achievement* is taken here as an indicator of effectiveness.

What are the goals and functions of the development council?

Generally stated, the development council is supposed to synchronize and unify all development efforts being rendered in a specific geographic area, i.e., the region, province, city, municipality, and barangay. These goals and functions have been specifically identified in their legal bases, namely, E.O. No. 121, L.O.I. No. 22, and MLGCD Memo-Circular No. 76-110. Thus the following were taken into consideration in determining the extent of goal attainment of the development councils:

- (1) The role of the development council in the preparation and formulation of the socio-economic profile and development plan for the area; and

- (2) Programs and projects being implemented in the area, if any, that can be directly attributed to efforts of the development council. This included a look into the developmental content of the programs and projects.

### The Regional Development Council of Region II

Out of the original membership of 18 in 1975, the Region II RDC's membership had quadrupled in size to 78 by 1979. The Chairman since it was first established has been Governor Faustino Dy of Isabela while the Vice-Chairman, Dr. Constanancio Ancheta, who is also the NEDA Regional Executive Director, is the second to serve in such a capacity.

The RDC is composed of three major structural bodies, namely:

(1) The *Council Proper*, composed of the entire RDC membership. As per resolution of the Region II RDC the membership of this council includes all governors of provinces, all directors of national government agencies, the chairmen of the Regional Mayor's League and the Regional Association of Barangays, and the presidents or provosts of state colleges and universities in the region, or a total of 78 members.

The Council Proper serves as a general assembly where policies and decisions arrived upon by the Executive Committee are submitted for approval.

(2) The *Executive Committee*, composed of local officials, regional directors and other government officials whose functions are considered vital or among the priorities of the

region. The Executive Committee has the following members:

- (a) The NEDA Regional Executive Director who is the Chairman;
- (b) The Regional Directors of the Ministry of Public Highways, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Local Governments and Community Development, and the Bureaus of Agricultural Extension and Plant Industry of the Ministry of Agriculture;
- (c) Two representatives of the elective members of the Council Proper;
- (d) The general managers of the regional or subregional development authorities existing in the region.

As the policy making body, the Executive Committee is the "think-tank" of the RDC. It is responsible for providing the leadership and direction of the development efforts in the region.

(3) The *Technical Staff: The NEDA Regional Office* composed of the two divisions (the Plan Formulation Division and the Program Coordination Division) and an administrative staff, the NEDA Regional Office (NRO) is headed by a Regional Executive Director. The NRO OF Region II has a total personnel complement of 32.

The Technical Staff is responsible for assisting the RDC in planning at the regional level, and it provides the necessary technical expertise and administrative support to the RDC in the formulation of regional plans, programs, policies and guidelines, and in the coordination of all planning

and programming activities of local and national entities at the regional level. Moreover, the NRO monitors the implementation of the approved regional development plan.

(4) *Task Forces.* Aside from the above-mentioned bodies as provided by law, the RDC of Region II, in accordance with guidelines from the NEDA Central Office, passed a resolution approving the creation of five sectoral task forces as component parts of the Region II Planning Machinery. These were task forces for (a) Social Development; (b) Industry, Manufacturing, Mining, and Construction; (c) Tourism and External Trade; (d) Agriculture; and (e) Infrastructure and Utilities.

Such task forces are mainly responsible for monitoring the implementation of regional programs and projects that are under their respective sectors.

#### *The Coordinative Capacity of the Region II RDC*

It may be recalled that coordinative capacity is indexed by four elements, namely, perception of commonality of goals, leadership, authority, and presence of a technical staff.

*Perception Among the Members of Commonality of Goals.* This indicator concerns the issue of whether or not the members of the RDC have learned to look beyond their traditional parochial perspective (i.e., viewing the implementation of development programs and projects from the point of view of their province or sector only) and adopted a broader regional, i.e., inter-areal and inter-

sectoral perspective.

Based on the interviews conducted, documents analyzed and questionnaires retrieved from key RDC members it appears that members do not perceive a commonality of goals. One governor complained,

Most of the governors have been asking one another about their priorities and what has been done (by the RDC) about it, and nothing so far has been done.

This same governor observed that during RDC meetings, there had been cases when the interests of a particular province were overlooked. As the governor put it, "after the RDC meetings, I can hear some talks like some agenda was not included, but it should be included... and the poor governor will be thinking, 'my priority was not included there.'"

On the other hand, even sector members (regional directors and heads of sectoral agencies in the area) stated that "each agency feels that his sector should be the priority."

Member agencies still tend to be more province-oriented (among member governors) and sector-oriented (among sectoral agency representatives) rather than region-oriented. A key member of the RDC Executive Committee has indeed observed that during RDC meetings, "each governor was trying to protect his own province."

*Leadership.* From our interviews, it comes out clearly that the leadership of the Region II RDC is strong. This stems from the Chairman's strong and commanding personality and leadership style. Most of the



RDC members share this perception and trace it to his strong personality and close ties with higher authorities. Consequently, the Chairman is able to effect some coordination among the members. This has become a "plus factor" in analyzing the coordinative capacity of the RDC, thereby offsetting, to a certain extent, the weakened coordinative capacity brought about by an unshared perception of commonality of goals.

*Authority of the RDC.* The findings of this study would seem to strongly indicate that the RDC does not exercise authority to determine the region's development priorities, including allocation of funds. Consequently, the council's coordinative capacity, as far as this indicator is concerned, has been weakened.

It must be noted, that L.O.I. No. 61 provides for a Regional Development Fund (RDF) which is to be devoted primarily for programs and projects that are regional in scope as determined by the RDC. The RDF is the national government counterpart for regional projects that are approved by the RDC. However, when this study was conducted, the L.O.I. has not yet been implemented pending the release of guidelines from the NEDA and the Budget Commission, particularly those concerning counterpart funding arrangements between the RDCs and the national government.

Thus, in theory and in intention, the RDC does have authority over such funds. However, such authority was never exercised in practice, hence weakening the council's coordinative capacity.

Another issue that must be raised here is the amount of the RDF. The amount has to be significantly large to fund significant development programs and projects. However, the initial amount earmarked for the RDF (which has yet to be released) is perceived by some Region II RDC officials to be insufficient: only ₱80 million is to be appropriated among all the various regions of the country.

Again, as far as authority over the personnel movement of the RDC members is concerned, the RDC's coordinative capacity is weak: it has no formal powers over its members in terms of promotion, transfer, reassignment, etc. If it had this power, then the RDC members will be compelled to take their jobs more seriously since their performance in the RDC will have influence over their career patterns.

Indeed it has been the personality of the RDC Chairman in effecting decisions that has been the more important factor than any formal authority vested on the RDC.

As a consequence of this, the Chairman has been described by some members as coercive. There has been a case where the leadership was able to effect the transfer of an RDC member out of the region. This is significant because the RDC Chairman does not formally have power over personnel.

It is to be admitted, however that this informal authority exercised by the RDC Chairman over its members has strengthened, to a certain extent, its coordinative capacity, as far as authority over personnel movement is concerned.

*Technical Staff.* Technical support is provided to the RDC by the NEDA Regional Office.

A management study on the NROs throughout the country conducted by the NEDA Regional Development Staff in Manila revealed that "on the whole, NRO personnel feel that there is the need to restructure the NRO to enhance its effectiveness and to enable it to cope with current as well as contemplated work program of activities."<sup>7</sup>

This need has also been recognized by the Regional Executive Director (RED) of Region II. This has likewise been felt by other key RDC members. According to the NEDA RED, the NRO of Region II is understaffed, thus he "has made efforts in Manila to expand or restructure their staffing in order that (they) will be able to employ the appropriate staff to undertake the additional function of monitoring the developmental projects of the various regional offices in the area" which have to be effectively coordinated by the RDC.

At present, the NRO of Region II is composed of a technical staff of only eleven members servicing 78 RDC members. The problem is compounded by this staff's insufficient technical capability to appropriately answer the needs of the region. The NEDA RED cited, for example, the

need for an engineer for infrastructure who would be in a position to expertly and knowledgeably monitor infrastructure projects, such as irrigation, in the region. Of course, qualified technical men in the area could not really be expected to be attracted to the low salaries which the NRO offers.

Based on the above discussions on the indicators of coordinative capacity, *there seems to be enough evidence to conclude that the RDC's capacity as a coordinating mechanism for the planning and implementation of development programs and projects has been weak.* This means that the capacity to coordinate the efforts of the various local governments and line agencies to carry out collective executive action is inadequate. The RDC's weak coordinative capacity can probably be attributed to its lack of control over the allocation of funds in order to enable it to plan, and more importantly, to implement programs and projects of its own.

### *The Ways of Coordination*

In order to determine coordinative performance, a comparative study of the matters discussed during the RDC meetings as reflected by the minutes was conducted. It was observed that the discussions revolved around the following areas:

*Substantive matters.* These include discussions on planning, endorsement of project proposals, and on the regional budget proposal and the agencies' regional budgets.

*Administrative matters.* These include discussions on organization and staff, meeting procedures, and financing of RDC operational

<sup>7</sup>Memorandum to Dr. Jose Lawas on Report of Presidential Commission on Reorganization Survey in Region II entitled "A Report on the Management Study of the NEDA Regional Offices," October 17-22, 1977. This portion has been based on a Management Study Report conducted by the NEDA Regional Development Staff in Manila and all NROs throughout the country.

expenses.

*Other matters.* These include briefings on program status, and "others."

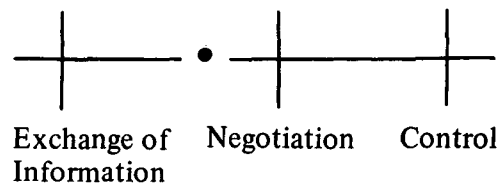
The topics discussed were also classified as to whether they concerned only one sector or several sectors (inter-sectoral) and whether they covered only one area or several areas (inter-areal). The study revealed that out of the total 84 topics (substantive, administrative, and others) discussed, 52 or 62 percent could be classified as inter-sectoral and inter-areal. This meant that most of the topics discussed during meetings were not confined to only one sector, nor to only one area (e.g., province). This would seem to indicate that the coordination function which the RDC performs is much more significant.

However, further analysis revealed that although there has been an attempt to discuss the various inter-sectoral and inter-areal development efforts in Region II, there has been little collective executive action. The RDC meetings served as forums for exchange of information and negotiation (but more of the former) because the discussions were limited to briefing and updating one another on what was going on in one's particular area or sector. For instance, were ongoing programs modified based on the discussions? Were there certain sectors or areas identified that have not been involved previously in the implementation of programs that should have actually been involved in the first place? These and other substantive issues regarding planning and implementation of projects do not seem to have

occupied the RDC, based on the minutes of its meetings.

Furthermore, although majority of the discussions were on substantive matters – planning and projects (42.5 percent) – little has been said regarding the RDC's control over the implementation of these plans and projects. This is clear evidence of the lack or absence of collective executive action, and could be attributed to the lack of legal authority of the RDC over the line agencies, particularly in the allocation of funds. Moreover, these plans and programs are subject to the approval of higher authorities, namely the President or the national offices of the line agencies.

Therefore, although there seems to be a significant interactive (inter-sectoral and inter-areal) undertaking by the RDC, its way of coordination based on all our indicators, has mostly been confined to exchange of information, but moving in the direction of negotiation. Thus, if plotted in the continuum ways of coordination, it will look thus:



### *The Effectiveness of the RDC*

The effectiveness of the Region II RDC was measured primarily in terms of goal attainment. The overall stated goal of the RDC is aligned to that declared in the National Development Plan which is to improve the quality of life of the people and to eradicate poverty in society.

At the regional level, such goals may be attained through the various programs and projects that the RDC may initiate, develop, finance, and even implement.

In an interview with the RDC Chairman, he said that the RDC's major accomplishment so far is the "integration" of all government projects at the regional level. This means that the RDC has been the administrative mechanism largely responsible for providing the linkage among the various regional offices of the national government agencies operating in the region, and the local government of the area. It has been the forum utilized by both national and local government officials to present their respective plans, programs and projects, with the RDC responsible for providing the much needed unified regional perspective.

The most concrete evidence of the attempt of the RDC to provide a regional perspective and direction among its members is the recently completed *Cagayan Valley Five-Year Development Plan 1978-1982*, with the NEDA Regional Office providing the major technical assistance.

The development plan for the region is supposed to be the result of a series of plan preparations among the different levels of government starting from the barangay level. As described by the NEDA Regional Executive Director,

Ideally, the Regional Development Plan should have been based upon the provincial development plans of the member-provinces, which in turn should each have been an integration of their respective municipalities' development plans, which also should

have ideally been based on the barangay plans.

However, such a process has not been followed in the preparation of the Region II regional development plan owing to the lack of capability for planning at the lower local government levels. In fact, the absence of planning staffs among the provinces and municipalities in the region is the first administrative problem pinpointed by the region's *Plan*. Such a problem has been aggravated by the fact that most provincial and municipal development councils in the region are not operational and that the NRO staff is itself undermanned.

With the NEDA Regional Office performing the lead pivotal role, the RDC has already drafted the long term plan to the year 2000, the Five and Ten Year Medium Term Plans, and the operational plans up to the year 1980.

The RDC has also made representations and recommendations, usually in the form of RDC resolutions in behalf of its members, requesting for support from the national government. The support requested is in terms of funding for specific projects, or policy decisions which require the blessing of the national authorities. Hence, the RDC has become the channel used by its members to make their felt needs heard by higher authorities.

Regarding infrastructure, the RDC has not had, so far, any project that it has on its own as a council planned, initiated, implemented or monitored. It has, however, lined up several infrastructure projects that it may carry out as a council if and when the Regional Development Fund is released.

In order to better appreciate the RDC's role as coordinative body for the planning and implementation of development programs and projects in the region, the study looked into a national government-conceived program that has been implemented in the region through the RDC: the *Pamayanang Pilipino sa Bagong Lipunan* (PPBL).

The PPBL is the operating program of the National Coordinating Council for Town Planning, Housing, and Zoning (NCCTPHZ) created by virtue of L.O.I. No. 511. (This council was under the supervision of the Human Settlements Commission which later became the Ministry of Human Settlements.) The NCCTPHZ is supposed to serve as a mechanism for expediting, harmonizing, and synchronizing development activities in the nation's major urban and urbanizing center.

Specifically, the PPBL aims to assist local governments in: (1) the formulation of town plans, housing and zoning measures; (2) the conduct of training sessions; and (3) the designing and effecting of mechanisms for monitoring.

The PPBL was implemented at the regional level through the RDC. According to the NEDA-RDS Assistant Director, "the RDCs were commissioned as the coordinating bodies to undertake the full town planning program for the First Lady."

In accordance with Resolution No. 8 (June 15, 1977) of the Region II RDC, the RDC was made the sponsoring body for the NCC operations in the region. Consequently, it was officially termed as the RDC/NCC Program for Town Planning, Housing, and Zoning.

An RDC/NCC Executive Committee was created to be the policy making body of the PPBL in the region. Membership in this committee was later expanded to include all RDC members in order to obtain support from all the Regional Directors. Consequently, a Regional Secretariat together with supporting technical staff was organized.

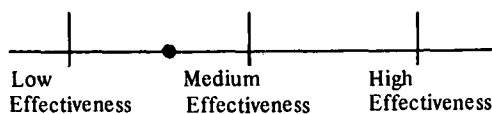
The RDC was able to obtain commitment from its member line agencies. For instance, directives from the regional offices of the MLGCD, BPW, MPH, Bureau of Lands have been sent to their respective field offices to provide the necessary technical support to the NCC operations in the target areas of the region. Logistic support was provided by the RDC members. For example, one vehicle with a driver was detailed on a full time basis to the regional secretariat. RDC members' support in terms of transportation, communication, and other facilities in their respective field offices were committed to the NCC operation in the target areas.

As mentioned earlier, the primary criterion for the choice of the NCC-covered municipalities was that they had to be identified as urban or urbanizing centers in the area. As a result, the 14 NCC-covered municipalities in Region II were able to prepare their respective town plans, zoning ordinances, and housing programs, with the RDC of Region II, together with the NCC representatives in the area.

In the implementation of the PPBL at the regional level, it was observed that the RDC's role was purely supportive and coordinative as a forum for exchange of information and negotiation. Planning

was done at the national level and its implementation was channeled through the RDC. As such, it coordinated the various efforts of the supporting agencies in the region. Given the strong leadership style of the RDC Chairman, it was not difficult to see why the member agencies extended their support to the program.

The RDC's performance, if gauged therefore in terms of its direct role in the preparation and implementation of the region's comprehensive development plan and the particular region-wide programs and projects, is not as effective as it is supposed to be. Graphically, we may plot it between low and medium effectiveness, as follows:



### Recommendations

As pointed out at the outset, the significance of this paper lies in the increasing role of local governments in the promotion of development of the country. It has been recognized that local governments are indispensable in the planning and implementation of various socioeconomic development programs. Consequently, the national government has moved into the general direction of making them its *partners* in the promotion of development. This has been basically premised on the policy of the state to transform the local governments into effective instruments entrusted with the performance of developmental functions that are more properly administered at the local level.

The inception of the idea to organize development councils at the various levels of government — i.e., regional, provincial/city, municipal and barangay levels — is directly related to this expanding role of local governments, in the developmental process. They have been organized to be the government's primary coordinating mechanisms for the planning and implementation of development programs and projects of the various instrumentalities of government — at their respective levels. How effective have they been as such?

The study on Region II revealed that its Regional Development Council is far from being effective. Such a condition has been attributed to problems that limit the Development Councils to perform to the maximum level of effectiveness. One observation emerges as the most important factor that hinders their good or effective performance, and that is: *the Development Council's capacity to coordinate is weak, not only in terms of resources and authority, but also in terms of capable technical staffs.* Therefore, the need to *strengthen* the development councils cannot be overemphasized if they are to perform their defined functions as coordinating mechanisms for the planning and implementation of development programs and projects. The importance of this is underscored by the fact that it is through the development councils that intergovernmental linkages among the national and local government offices in an area are operationalized and institutionalized.

Specifically, strengthening of the developing councils may be achieved through the following measures:

- (1) The appointment of a full time

chairman vested with adequate substantial authority for the RDC. This is consistent with the proposal for the appointment of an Area Development Manager for the lower local government levels particularly at the municipal level.

A full time RDC Chairman is imperative because development efforts in the region need total attention. A concurrent status (in this case, Provincial Governor and RDC Chairman) is not advisable because attention is divided between the region's welfare and the province's welfare.

The question of conflict of interest is therefore inevitable. Which interest should the Governor consider primary: the region's or his province's? This dilemma may be resolved by a full time RDC Chairman. This would also be consistent with the current thrust of the government in regional development as it prepares for the eventuality of full time regional governors to head the regional governments to be organized in each of the regions throughout the country.

(2) Also related to this is the organization of a full time planning staff composed of adequately qualified and technically equipped personnel with the corresponding competitive salaries to provide the necessary technical expertise that is needed by the council.

As identified by the NEDA Regional Office, "an obstacle to the institutionalization of the planning process in the region is the absence of permanent full time planning officers in most of the regional government offices and in virtually all local government units, specifically the

provinces and municipalities.<sup>8</sup>

Even the *Five Year Development Plan of the Region*<sup>9</sup> identifies such a problem. Under the heading, "Administrative Problems," the document identifies three major ones: (1) absence of planning staffs; (2) lack of regional offices; and (3) lack of basic planning skills. According to the document, "provinces and municipalities in the region do have development staffs." Citing the planning staffs organized by local governments to serve some emergency planning body such as the NCC Program on Town Planning, Housing and Zoning, and the MLGCD Direct Technical Assistance Program, the regional plan describes them as "*mere ad hoc* bodies composed of personnel already holding other positions in the local governments." Thus, the plan concludes, such staffs cannot devote complete attention to planning. It adds that "the absence of permanent planning staffs minimizes the effectivity of training sessions conducted for planners because of lack of continuity in training."

(3) The problem of unwieldiness of the development council has been partially solved with the creation of an Executive Committee for the RDC. Thus, the compulsory organization of such a provincial body to act for and in behalf of the Provincial Development Council might be a welcome move to alleviate the problem at the provincial level.

<sup>8</sup>RDC Development Digest (Region II), Vol. XII, Nos. 2, 3 (April-September 1978), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>Cagayan Valley (Region II), *Five Year Development Plan 1978-1982*, Tuguegarao, Philippines, September 1977, p. 12.

(4) In the area of funding, the council should have funds of its own in order to enable it to at least initiate development programs and projects for the area. It should have authority to raise, generate, disburse, and monitor its own funds, using them according to the priorities as determined by the council itself. Perhaps, we could start at the Regional Development Fund as stipulated in L.O.I. No. 61. In addition, such a fund should be increased (from P80 million) if it is to be apportioned among the various regions of the country and if it is to be used for meaningful and significant regional projects.

(5) Granting more authority over budget and personnel matters to the development council should be seriously considered. This means that the council should at least be given a certain amount of authority to pass upon and evaluate the budgets of its member agencies in order to insure that they are consistent with the region's (or province's or municipal's) developmental thrust.

In conjunction with granting authority, the council chairman should also be vested with a certain amount of substantial administrative authority, for example, in the evaluation of appointments, and in the transfer and promotion of council members.

These moves will enhance the stature of the council (and the Chairman) among the member agencies as an authority within the area.

(6) The linkages among the different levels of development councils, i.e., from the Regional, to the Provincial, (including City), to the Municipal and finally to the Barangay Development Council level, should be

strengthened. This means that authority relationships should be clearly defined with the RDC as the highest level of the hierarchy and the MDC (or BDC, if any) at the lowest level. This will provide more inputs into the regional plan and into the other activities of the RDC as a result of increased compulsory participation by the lower level development councils.

(7) Finally, it is recommended that further studies on this area be encouraged and supported. This is especially significant as there is a perceptible trend towards dependence on the development council mechanism as the leading planning body of the area.

A specific area of study may be on the viability of the recently activated *Sangguniang Pampook* of Regions IX and XII to evolve into full regional governments. If ever, it would be the first of its kind in the country, and would therefore also serve as models when they are organized for the rest of the regions in the future.

The recommendations forwarded, modest as they are, may very well be the first step towards institutionalizing and operationalizing the development councils' role as functional institutional linkages among the national and local governments, and other sectors operating in the area.