

The Regional Development Council: Its Role in Regional Development

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Introduction

Regional development stands today as one of the major goals of and instruments for national development. The concern for regional development has, through the past few years, transformed from a lightly-regarded recognition to a matter of national policy. This change can be attributed to the emergence of "lagging" regions in the midst of socioeconomic growth experienced by other regions. The Five-Year Philippine Development Plan (1978-82) describes this regional growth disparity in this manner:

A number of regions in this country lag behind the more developed ones in forms of growth employment and provision of basic services to their growing population. These depressed regions especially the rural areas became the seat of discontent in many instances in the past.

The rapid migration of population to a few urban areas of more development regions resulted in serious employment, housing, health, and other congestion problems. This premature migration made urbanization more an aspect of poverty than a symbol of growth.

RDC Functions and Membership

To carry out the goal of regional development, administrative mechanisms have to be designed and created in order to systematically organize and coordinate diverse and complex governmental efforts.

At the regional level the institution that has been created to carry out the goal of regional development are the Regional Development Councils or the RDCs.

Letter of Instruction (LOI) No. 22 signed by the President on 31 December 1972 directed the organization of Regional Development

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Councils. Broadly, the functions of the RDC include the formulation of regional plans, data gathering, monitoring, and research. Lately, the operationalization of the regional budgeting system as mandated by LOI No. 447 has made regional budget preparation a function of the RDC. In addition, LOI No. 61 grants to the RDC the function of evaluating and approving projects to be funded out of the Regional Development Fund provided for in the General Appropriations Decree. The critical task of linking planning and budgeting is being put into effect by the current practice of the Budget Commission to consult the RDC and the NEDA staff regarding requests made by local governments for special funds.

The RDC is composed of regional directors of national line departments involved in development activities, provincial governors, and city mayors in the region.

It is clear, therefore, that the RDC is at the heart of the regional development process. It is the "nerve center" of coordinated efforts to promote regional growth. This is not to say, however, that the RDC is clothed with sufficient authority to effectively carry out these functions.

Operational Problems

1) *Insufficient Administrative Authority*

The rather simple act of attendance in meetings can hardly be controlled by the RDC Chairman. Some regional directors designate representatives to attend RDC meetings. In many instances these representatives are not authorized to decide on matters involving commitments of their respective agencies. The absence of such clear-cut authority can lead to delays in the submission of monitoring reports as well as lessen the success of synchronized planning activities.

2) *Possible Overexpansion of RDC Membership*

Such an overexpansion is possible because Presidential Decree (PD) No. 797, allowing the acceptance of additional members through RDC resolution, does not put a numerical limit into the number of RDC members. Some RDCs in the country have over 35 members—an unwieldy group characterized by frequent lack of quorum in meetings. Consequently, important matters of regional significance cannot be promptly acted upon.

3) *Limited Scope of the Regional Development Fund (RDF)*

The availability in the national budget of some ₱30 million for RDC projects which directly benefit more than one city or province is a much-needed boost to the utility of the RDC. There are, however, limitations in the manner by which this fund can be availed of. For instance, the local government units in the area where the RDF-funded project will be located will have to put up a counterpart equivalent to 50 per cent of the national RDF allotment. Local government units which have very viable projects will not be able to avail of this fund if they have low incomes and cannot put up the required counterpart.

4) *Relatively Weak Subregional Coordination*

While the RDC coordinates plan formulation and policy execution at the regional level, the same cannot be totally said of their subregional counterparts such as the provincial, city, and municipal development councils. The link between the RDC and these councils is very fragile and even vague. The RDC does not possess any direct administrative control of the PDCs, CDCs, and MDCs. It can only rely on its persuasive capability and the influence of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development (MLGCD) which initiates and supports the establishment of these councils.

5) *Inadequate Participation from the Private Sector*

This problem is currently recognized by the RDC in Eastern Visayas. Infusing more participation from private groups into the regional planning process is particularly important in programs requiring private initiative such as in business and/or industrial enterprises.

6) *Creation of other Government Units, with Functions which can Overlap those of the RDC Technical Staff*

Clear delineation of functions have to be agreed upon if the government is to insure efficient and effective use of resources. Such a delineation should perhaps be based on distinctive competence and on legal mandates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The role that the RDC performs in the process of regional development is a crucial one. Experience has shown that the RDC is able

to formulate regional plans that include programs of the different national line departments. Although local government inputs in terms of projects have been minimal, efforts are being exerted to evaluate local government projects in the light of the provisions embodied in the regional plan. In future planning activities, greater consideration will be accorded to plans emanating from the subregional levels. A corollary activity which can be undertaken is the upgrading of planning capabilities of provincial, city, and municipal development staffs as well as of the planning staffs of integrated area development projects.

In order to enhance the role of the RDC and make it more responsive to regional needs, some recommendations in addition to those mentioned earlier, are in order. These are the following:

1) The RDC should be clothed with some administrative authority to encourage better interagency participation in RDC deliberations and effect an improved project monitoring system. This recommendation is made in view of the nonimplementation of PD No. 955 which provides for the appointment of Presidential Regional Assistants.

2) RDCs should not include too many members to the point of creating an unwieldy organization.

3) More funds for RDC-sponsored projects should be made available within more flexible allocation guidelines.

4) A stronger linkage must exist between provincial, city, and municipal development councils so that coordination in planning should not be the monopoly of the regional level. This will also provide better inputs into the regional planning and other activities of the RDC as a result of more widespread direct participation.

5) More participation from the private sector in RDC activities should be encouraged through the formation of Task Forces or Committees such as those on Finance and on Entrepreneurial Development.

6) Research and extension orientation of the region's colleges and universities should be promoted so that they can gear their curricular offerings and expertise to regional needs.

7) A corroborative arrangement must be established among the various government entities engaged in planning. For instance, the Ministry of Human Settlements can concentrate on physical planning at the micro-level while the NEDA can cover economic and other forms of planning.