

PRESS RELEASE

CeLeBoSoLe Growth Quadrangle Convention on Poverty, Population and Environment

The interconnection between population and environment and its impact on food security and poverty are the main issues that will be tackled by the four governors and mayors from the 16 municipalities and 3 cities of the provinces of Cebu, Leyte, Bohol and Southern Leyte (CeLeBoSoLe) in the CeLeBoSoLe Growth Quadrangle Convention on Poverty, Population and Environment on April 18, 2008 at the Bohol Tropics Resort Hotel in Tagbilaran City, Bohol.

The convention is sponsored by the Province of Bohol through the leadership of Governor Erico B. Aumentado in partnership with PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. and its local NGO partner, PROCESS-Bohol. During the meeting, the CELEBOSOLE Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) will be signed by the provincial governors and mayors and concerned government agencies. The MOA is patterned after a previous agreement which was signed in October 2002 focusing on coastal resource management of the Danajon Bank. It also aims to revitalize the CeLeBoSoLe Council and its Technical Working Groups (TWG). The Council is an inter-regional, multi-province and multi-agency management body composed of the Governors of the provinces of Cebu, Leyte, Bohol, and Southern Leyte. Other members include regional heads of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Philippine National Police, Office of the President for Central and Eastern Visayas, and the Mayors of the 19 municipalities and cities whose boundaries overlap the Danajon ecosystem. In addition, the Danajon EcoFIRM Project for CELEBOSOLE will be formally adopted. The project aims to rehabilitate, conserve, protect and manage the Danajon Growth Quadrangle, and integrates population management.

Nearly one million people live in the vicinity of the Danajon Bank that depend upon its fisheries for sustenance and livelihood. The bay contains the sole documented double barrier reef in the Philippines and South Asia, comprising over 1% of the total coral reef area in the Philippines. Increasing demand for food-fish coupled with illegal commercial fishing and weak enforcement of environmental codes have contributed to the rapid decline of the Bank's fisheries over the years. The Danajon ranks among the most densely populated ecosystems in the Philippines with an estimated average density of about 450 persons/km² compared to the Philippines national average density of 253. Local populations living in the Danajon are expanding at an average rate of 3.1% per annum compared to the Philippines overall growth rate of 2.3%. Over 60% of people living in these communities live below the poverty line.

This particular initiative led by Governor Aumentado is pioneering as it links sectors such as population and environment utilizing the Integrated Population and Coastal Resource Management or IPOPCORM approach which was recently declared by USAID as a gold standard model for population, health and environment integration. The lessons learned and experiences in the past six years in 33 coastal municipalities in the Philippines is currently being scaled up ecosystem-wide via the Alternative Advocacy Project (AAP) designed and implemented by PATH Foundation Philippines, Inc. (PFPI) with support from The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.