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Starting Strong on the SDGs in Asia: Readiness in the Philippines

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Key Messages

- The Philippines has already established a solid foundation for pursuing and achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs).
- Nearly all of the issues covered by the 17 SDGs are also covered by the Philippine *Agenda 21* and Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2010-2016.
- The government has further committed to incorporating the SDGs in development plans and strategies, including Filipino 2040, PDP 2017-2020, and local plans.
- The Philippines is currently strengthening the existing national institutional framework for sustainable development while reinvigorating local level networks.
- There are well established participatory frameworks and processes, and a good level of SDG awareness.
- The Philippines have incorporated the SDGs in the 2016 budget with ample allocations for crucial programs.
- The Philippines will likely attain many of the SDGs if the country stays on the current development course while intensifying efforts to overcome key development challenges; mixed results or failure are likely if it stays with business-as-usual or adopts contradictory policies and programmes.

1. Background

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago consisting of more than 7,100 islands and islets, most of which are inhabited by a population of over 100 million. The Philippine archipelago lies along the Pacific Ring of Fire and within the North-Western Pacific Basin's typhoon belt, making it a megadiverse country, very rich in natural resources, especially minerals. For the same reason, the Philippines is highly vulnerable to natural hazards such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and climatic conditions, which have recently become more frequent, extreme and devastating. An example is Typhoon Haiyan, the strongest typhoon (315 kph with gusts reaching 379kph) to hit land, which ravaged the Southern Philippines and killed more than 6,000 people in 2013.

The Philippine economy has been one of the best performers in the region in recent years. Its gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average of 6.2% annually in the last six years¹ despite the drastic slowdown in the global economy. The economy is dominated by the services sector, which accounts for more than half of GDP. Although manufacturing has been gaining ground, the industry sector has remained at around a third of the economy for most of the last 20 years. The increase in the share of services sector, has been due to the steadily contracting agriculture sector, whose share is now down to 10%. Agricultural productivity has been declining due to a number of reasons, including high vulnerability to climate change impacts (e.g. drought, typhoons and flooding). This is unfortunate since a considerable portion of the country's poor population is engaged in farming and fisheries, thus making poverty reduction one of its greatest challenges. As of 2014, 25.8% of Filipinos are below the poverty line, which has been estimated at a per capita income of PHP 10,534 a year².

The Philippine social development situation can best be described briefly through its mixed performance in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It succeeded in meeting the targets for extreme (food) poverty; gender equality in education; child mortality; eradicating tuberculosis; and providing safe drinking water. However, it failed in reducing poverty, which remains at about a quarter of the population; bringing down infant and maternal mortalities and malnutrition; improving primary enrolment and completion; combating HIV/AIDS; and improving sanitation. Some of the major reasons for these failures are the fragmented geography, which leads to difficulty in reaching far-flung and island municipalities; and the high incidence of displaced population due to frequent natural disasters and armed conflicts in some parts of the country.

In terms of environmental integrity, the MDG achievement is also telling. The country met the targets on forest cover, protected areas and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. However, forests continue to be under extreme stress from unsustainable farming practices, encroachment, conversion and illegal logging — all leading to biodiversity loss. To date, the Philippines, one of 17 megadiverse^{3,4} countries, is among the top five forest biodiversity hotspots globally^{5,6}. It is "one of

¹ World Bank data for 2010-2015.

² Philippine Statistical Authority. www.psa.gov.ph

³ The World Conservation Monitoring Center of UNEP refers to the world's top biodiversity-rich countries as "megadiverse" countries. <http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/megadiverse-countries>

⁴ <http://www.activesustainability.com/top-10-countries-in-biodiversity#1>

⁵ <http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/megadiverse-countries>

⁶ Conservation International. <http://www.conservation.org/NewsRoom/pressreleases/Pages/The-Worlds-10-Most-Threatened-Forest-Hotspots.aspx>

the few nations that is, in its entirety, both a hotspot and a megadiversity country, placing it among the top priority hotspots for global conservation”⁷. Rapid urbanisation and unsustainable consumption and production have also led to pollution, ground subsidence, salt-water intrusion, among others.

Notwithstanding the extreme challenges facing the country, it is likely that with policy reforms as well as on-going and future programmes, along with strong international and internal cooperation, the Philippines could achieve many, if not all, of the country-specific targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1.2 Overview of Key National Development

Planning Framework

The Philippine National Development Planning Framework is one of the more mature planning frameworks in the region even when compared to more advanced neighbouring economies. The framework helps put in motion a holistic and thorough process consisting of coordination, implementing and monitoring mechanisms, and is supported by facilitative knowledge tools.

Institutional Framework for Planning

The institutional framework evolved from the National Economic Council created in 1935 into the now 43-year old National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), an oversight and coordinating ministry-level agency that has offices in 17 of 18⁸ administrative regions of the country. NEDA is mandated to “formulate development plans and ensure that plan implementation achieves the goals of national development.”⁹ NEDA consists of a Board and a Secretariat. The NEDA Board is the country’s premier social and economic development planning and policy coordinating body. It is composed of the President as chair; the Secretary of Socio-Economic Planning and Director-General of the NEDA Secretariat as vice-chair; and 20 Secretaries (Ministers) of government (e.g. Finance, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry, Public Works and Highways, Social Welfare and Development, Interior and Local Government departments); and entities such as the Deputy Governor of the Bangko Sentral, Governor of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, and President of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines. The structure helps to ensure that there is sufficient coordination and participation in the national planning framework.

⁷ Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund. <http://www.cepf.net/resources/hotspots/Asia-Pacific/Pages/Philippines.aspx>

⁸ The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao has its own planning office, which prepares the regional plan. The ARMM plan is integrated into the national development plan by NEDA.

⁹ The NEDA Mission. <http://www.neda.gov.ph/neda-mission-english-version/>

Major Plans and the Philippine Planning

Process

The Philippines prepares quite a number of plans and strategies for various levels (national and sub-national/local), sectors (e.g., socio-economic, power, agriculture, etc.) and themes (e.g. poverty reduction, local land use, gender and development). NEDA is directly responsible for coordinating the formulation of national long-term strategies, the 6-year (to coincide with the legally set term of national government administrations) national and regional development plans, physical framework plan, Philippine Agenda 21 (PA 21), national priority plans, reconstruction and disaster risk reduction plans, and all other plans that the government might consider important such as the implementation plans for SDGs and other global commitments. NEDA is also responsible for producing, monitoring and evaluating the national investment programmes that operationalise the plans. Being the lead planning and policymaking body, NEDA is responsible for ensuring the implementation and monitoring of progress of multi-dimensional global agenda the country commits to, such as Agenda 21, Johannesburg Plan of Action, The Future We Want, MDGs and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda or the SDGs.

In terms of process, Philippine planning is highly coordinative, participatory and uses a top down-bottom up approach. It starts with a Presidential instruction to undertake a specific planning exercise based on a set priority agenda; preparation of planning guidelines by NEDA; creation of multi-stakeholder/multi-sectoral planning committees and sub-committees; planning at lower-level (sector and local) plans; consolidation of lower-level plans into the national plan; preparation of the public investment programme; consultations all throughout the process; approval by the NEDA Board; review and endorsement of the Legislature (which is also represented in the planning committees); budgeting for the plan and public investment programme; preparation of the Results Matrix¹⁰; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the plan; reporting on progress; and subsequent assessment of the plan for the next planning cycle.

¹⁰ The Results Matrix (RM) is the national plan's principal M&E and reporting tool designed to focus on the achievements of outcomes and impacts of its priorities. It contains statements of objectives with a corresponding indicator framework for the various levels of results (goal and outcomes) to be achieved under the plan. http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Revalidated-RM_Final.pdf

2. Coherence and linkages of national goals, objectives and strategies with SDGs

As mentioned earlier, the Philippines formulates quite a number of plans/strategies. For the purpose of this section, three major national plans/strategies will be reviewed against their responsiveness to the SDGs. These are the 6-year Philippine Development Plan (PDP), PA 21, and Filipino 2040. The current PDP, which covers the period 2011-2016, is on its last year; PA 21 has been in place since its launching 20 years ago in September 1996; and Filipino 2040 is still being developed and consulted to this date. The first two documents, therefore, could not have considered the SDGs as formulated and launched on 25 September, 2015. Filipino 2040 is a long-term vision document whose timeframe goes beyond the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but can still align its vision with the SDGs.

2.1 The Philippine Development Plan

As soon as the MDGs were launched, the Philippines incorporated them in the Philippine Development Plans (PDP). Incorporation was rather easy inasmuch as most of the issues being addressed by MDGs have been critical development challenges to the country and, therefore, have long been reflected in several PDPs. Notwithstanding this, the regular monitoring of the MDGs indicated the country's slow progress in achieving certain goals so the government intensified efforts to attain said goals. One initiative was the use of the MDG as the PDP's framework for social development. The current PDP (2011-2016) states that:

The government is committed to attain the MDGs by 2015 through accelerated programs and affirmative action in education, health, nutrition, gender and development, housing, and social protection interventions. It shall be the priority consideration in planning, policy formulation and programming of programs, activities, projects in the social sector, with particular emphasis on MDGs where the country is lagging behind (Chapter 8-Social Development, page 260).

The question now is whether PDP, 2011-2016 is likewise closely linked or aligned with the SDGs as much as it is with the MDGs. It should be noted that the current PDP was already in its terminal years when the SDGs were agreed upon and rolled out. To respond to this question, this paper reviewed the PDP against the 17 SDGs, and their targets and strategies as spelled out in the 2030 Agenda. The review is summarised in Table 1, which shows that the goals, objectives and strategies of the PDP are strongly aligned with and supportive of the SDGs. The PDP's overarching goal of inclusive growth embodies most, if not all, of SDGs. The PDP defines inclusive growth as a high (economic) growth that is sustained over a long-term period, generates mass employment, reduces poverty, and promotes social cohesion¹¹. This growth is strong enough to create needed positive impacts on the population that is large and possessing complex social and societal challenges. The various components of the PDP support this goal in terms of strategies and programmes that are

¹¹ PDP, 2011-2016 – Chapter 1. <http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/CHAPTER-1.pdf>

deemed directed at attaining development in the economic, social, and infrastructure sectors while ensuring that the environment is protected and natural resources are enhanced and utilised sustainably. In addition, the PDP integrates good governance and anti-corruption as an overarching theme in all its interventions.

Table 1
Comparison of Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Targets of
PDP, 2011-2016 with the SDGs

No.	SDG	PDP, 2011-2016 Sample Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Programs, Targets
1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain inclusive growth over the long-term • Slow down population growth through, e.g. responsible parenting; and accepted/approved family planning methods and services • Converge poverty reduction programs in needy areas: <i>Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino</i> Program (4Ps); Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDSS), Self-Employment Assistance – Kaunlaran (SEA-K) • Update the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction database on at least 5.6 million poor households by 2014
2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake focused interventions on population groups at risk of all forms of malnutrition (e.g. pregnant women, infants, children) • Increase resources for nutrition interventions, e.g. breastfeeding; food production and distribution; iron fortification; food-based safety nets (e.g. distribution of rice), emergency employment; etc. • Improve food security and rural incomes by diversifying production and markets, developing value chains, improving credit access, etc. • Increase resilience to climate change risks: develop climate-sensitive technologies, establish climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and climate-responsive food production systems • Invest in sustainable fishing technologies and products
3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all at all ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attain the MDG and specific targets pertaining to health • Provide direct conditional cash transfers through the 4Ps, which covers education and maternal health; achieve universal health care including health insurance, nutrition and reproductive health • Focus public health programs on maternal and child mortality; morbidity and mortality from TB, dengue and malaria, and the prevalence of HIV-AIDS, in addition to emerging diseases • Mainstream climate change adaptation (CCA) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) in social development interventions
4	Ensure exclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaffirm the highest priority for basic education as a right of each Filipino. Make every Filipino functionally literate. • Develop skilled and professional workforce to attain productivity, competitiveness, industry relevance, and social responsiveness. • Accelerate the implementation of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda towards the attainment of Education for All and the MDGs • Address job-skills mismatch through tighter industry-academe links

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve full enrollment in elementary and 93% enrollment in secondary level by 2016.
5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream gender and development concerns in planning, policy formulation, program and project development and implementation • Address the differentiated needs of women and men. • Target a gender parity index of 1 in basic education
6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream Integrated Water Resources Management in policies, plans and programs to protect and regulate water for security and ecosystem health; provide responsive water supply services; adapt and respond to emerging challenges, such as CCA and DRRM; etc. • Increase the level of investments in the water supply and sanitation sector as means to achieve the MDGs • Develop effective sanitation governance that ensures that plans and policies (e.g. National Sanitation Code) are strictly implemented.
7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the use of clean fuel and indigenous resources for energy • Establish a financial mechanism to jump-start a massive electric vehicle (EV)-based public transportation system • Improve emissions standards
8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain inclusive growth that massively creates jobs • Establish emergency and guaranteed employment programs for workers affected by crisis, the seasonally jobless and the long-term unemployed, particularly the youth and women • Strengthen the Community-Based Employment Program; sustain the labor market; adhere to decent work standards; enable vulnerable workers to attain economic security; etc. • Enhance the employability of vulnerable workers, e.g. those in the informal economy, and displaced overseas, especially the women)
9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and integrate infrastructure initiatives • Invest massively in infrastructure, mainly through public-private partnership schemes, especially those that connect underserved but productive communities to markets, social services and value chains • Encourage industries to use cleaner technologies and practice extended producer responsibilities • Establish climate-resilient agricultural infrastructure and climate-responsive food production systems
10	Reduce inequality within and among countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower and protect the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged from individual life cycle, economic, environmental and social risks. • Protect and empower ICCs/IPs' rights and welfare, and guarantee the security of land tenure of Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries. • Issue 48 ancestral domain titles and 48 ancestral land titles by 2014
11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate and implement the National Slum Upgrading Strategy • Resettle the marginalized and vulnerable sectors • Provide a total of 1.47M units of direct housing assistance by 2016. • Create sustainable communities/townsites to de-crowd urban areas
12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a 30% reduction in levels of pollution from 2009 to 2011, and a 5% annual reduction thereafter by 2016 in Metro Manila and other major urban centers
13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce greenhouse gas emissions (CO2 and methane) • Mainstream DRR and CCA in national, sectoral, regional and local development plans, including integration of hazard and climate

		<p>change vulnerability maps in the updating of Comprehensive Land Use Plans by LGUs and enforcement of zoning regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance capacities for monitoring, forecasting, hazard identification, early warning, and risk evaluation and management
14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the national integrated coastal management program • Apply the ecosystem approach to the management of fisheries and other marine resources, addressing transboundary policy and regulatory concerns • Implement the Coral Triangle Initiative National Plan of Action and the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion Conservation Plan
15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the protection of forest and reforested areas and sustain the productivity of agroforestry areas • Arrest forest degradation by, among others, implementing the Philippine National REDD+ Strategy • Strengthen management of protected areas through partnership with local communities, issuance of security of tenure, provision of alternative livelihood, etc. • Institutionalize the Payment for Environmental Services scheme • Increase forest cover by 600,000 hectares by 2016
16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerate asset reforms: complete the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program; fully implement the Indigenous People's Rights Act to ensure IPs' ownership and prior rights to their ancestral domains; effectively implement policies and laws concerning fisherfolk, and their coastal and marine settlements; etc. • Promote enabling mechanisms that strengthen stakeholders' participation and commitments and build partnerships between and among the local communities, LGUs, and government agencies • Ensure high-quality, efficient, transparent, accountable, accessible and nondiscriminatory delivery of public service • Strengthen the rule of law. Curb graft and corruption
17	Strengthen means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue trade through bilateral, multilateral and regional engagements and representation, and maximizing opportunities offered by existing trade agreements. • Harness/Maximize use of PPP modalities to finance plan strategies and programs

Source: Philippine Development Plan, 2011-2016. NEDA, 2013; Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNGA, 21 October 2015

2.2 The Philippine Agenda 21

The Philippine Agenda 21: A National Agenda for Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (PA 21) was produced in response to the call of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro for countries to formulate respective national sustainable development strategy as articulated in *Agenda 21*. It has been the country's platform for integrating human development into economic and environmental policies and strategies, and in integrating the concept of sustainable development into its governance framework. PA21 is one of the most-consulted document that took almost two years to produce. The process was intense but further strengthened trust and partnership between government and civil society. Together and in consultation with the Filipino people, they drew up the vision of a

better quality of life for all through the development of a just, moral, creative, spiritual, economically vibrant, caring, diverse yet cohesive society characterized by appropriate productivity, participatory and democratic processes and living in harmony within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature and the integrity of creation.

For this vision to be achieved, PA 21 set out to achieve the following goals: (1) a viable and vibrant economy; (2) a caring social system that promotes cohesion, peaceful co-existence and harmony between and among its constituents; (3) a protected and well maintained ecosystem (ecological integrity); and (4) institutionalised and responsible governance system.

In addition, PA 21 adhered to 15 principles as its operational framework: (1) the primacy of developing the human potential; (2) holistic science and appropriate technology; (3) cultural, moral and spiritual sensitivity; (4) self-determination; (5) national sovereignty; (6) gender sensitivity; (7) peace, order and national unity; (8) social justice and inter- and intra-generational and spatial equity; (9) participatory democracy; (10) institutional viability; (11) viable, sound and broad-based economic development; (12) sustainable population; (13) ecological soundness; (14) bio-geographical equity and community-based resource management; and (15) global cooperation.

The foregoing shows that despite the 20-year gap in their formulation, PA 21 and the SDGs are closely aligned. The slight variations are merely due to the fact that the SDGs have not yet been adapted to national contexts, and to difference in timeframes. For instance, climate change adaptation is not prominent in PA 21 because climate impacts were not yet defined and devastating when PA 21 was formulated. PA 21 was actually enhanced about 10 years ago but even during that time, climate change was still not seen as a major concern.

2.3 Filipino 2040

The Philippines is currently formulating a long-term vision for year 2040 to serve as the national development framework and guide the country's medium—to long-term priorities. For this purpose, national consultations were undertaken and some of the aspirations and priorities of the people that came out included: poverty reduction; hunger eradication; stable and decent income; secured education; accessible quality healthcare; protection from natural disasters; and peace and security for the people. The Philippines, through the Secretary of Socioeconomic Planning, conveyed these priorities in the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

In view of the above aspirations, Filipino 2040 may include the following elements in the vision statement: Filipinos as having stable, secure and high level of well-being; with their own place to live; enjoying a high degree of freedom, and enabled by a caring and effective government. Relatedly, Filipino 2040 would possibly work on the following ideas as part of its larger goals: a responsive and resilient economy; productive and competitive enterprises that create decent jobs; and resilient communities where people and environment are protected.

3. Preparatory process for SDGs

The Philippine preparatory process for implementing the SDGs will draw from various experiences in localising global agendas and commitments such as *Agenda 21*, Beijing platform of Action on

Women, Cairo Platform of Action on Population and Development, MDGs, etc. It usually involves (1) creating the institutional mechanism; (2) formulating the national agenda in a participatory manner; and (3) undertaking information, education and communication advocacy as integral part of the process. The agendas are then integrated into the PDPs, which then feeds into investment programming, budgeting and M&E (see Section 1).

3.1 Incorporating the SDGs into the existing planning framework

The Philippine commitment to incorporate the SDGs in the planning framework was highlighted in the Statement¹² delivered by NEDA's Secretary of Socio-Economic Planning during the UN Summit for the Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In fact, Secretary Arsenio Balisacan committed to budget for and monitor the implementation of the SDGs:

To move forward and achieve the overarching goal of eradicating poverty, we must now develop our national plans and budgets for its implementation and monitoring. In doing so, we will collaborate with civil society and all stakeholders in line with the principle of inclusiveness and accountability....The Philippines pledges to make the 2030 Agenda a reality and to leave no one behind. It is our sacred responsibility to our children and to future generations, and our solemn duty as members of the United Nations.

Section 2 above indicates that there are various entry points for integrating the SDGs in the Philippine planning framework, and that each of these entry points has already incorporated most elements of the SDGs in one way or another. PA 21, though still quite relevant, needs to be revisited since its last enhancement was already about 10 years ago. Nonetheless, its principles, strategies and action programs have been incorporated and enhanced in the PDPs, which serve as its operating mechanism. The formulation of the successor PDP (2017-2022) as well as its regional components will commence sometime in third quarter of 2016. As the leader of the process, NEDA will ensure that the Philippine commitment is met by using the SDGs as the planning framework. Meeting this commitment is actually not expected to pose any difficulty for the planners inasmuch as the current PDP already matches well the SDGs and will just have to set targets using indicators to be set by the Inter-Agency Experts Group on SDGs Indicators (IAEG-SDGI). Meanwhile, Filipino 2040 may take a few more months to complete. NEDA further showed will ensure that this is aligned with the 2030 Development Agenda.

3.2 Consultative process and communication advocacy for SDGs

In 2013, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) chose to assist the Philippines as one of 66 countries in an open and inclusive consultations with its people. The consultations included a broad discussion about the purpose and scope of the post-2015 development agenda and how a wide

¹² Philippine Statement, 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 27 September 2015
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21008philippines.pdf>

range of stakeholders can contribute to and greatly benefit from a transparent consultation. The consultations allowed the countries to substantively contribute to the global discussions, and realise an intergovernmental consensus regarding the post-2015 development agenda.

The Philippine consultation process was jointly undertaken by NEDA and the Philippine Statistical Authority (PSA). These two government agencies conducted three technical consultation workshops from September 2013 to June 2015 to discuss the initial post-2015 goals and targets, identify data requirements of possible SDGs, and discuss the draft outcome document on SDGs. They then convened provincial and regional meetings on the post-2015 development agenda. This process produced the Country Report that spelled out the Philippine position on the framework for post-2015 development agenda. It also served as the country's contribution to the global process, in terms of lessons learned from achieving the MDGs.

Soon after the launch of SDGs, the two agencies further organised three technical workshops to identify indicators to be monitored and agree on inputs to the global indicators framework. In addition, the PCSD held meetings to update its members on the SDGs and discuss next steps. NEDA and PSA are expected to intensify preparatory work for implementation and consultations as soon as the final set of indicators are approved by the UN Statistics Commission sometime soon¹³. This process will necessarily include information and communication advocacy, especially to concerned national agencies, stakeholder groups, and local government units. The Philippine Government, with assistance from the UN, will continue to build awareness on the profound importance of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. NEDA further shared that a parallel and multi-pronged approach that involves the following is being considered:

- An introductory workshop series to sensitise government officials and stakeholders to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs;
- A public awareness campaign to communicate the 2030 Agenda and SDGs to the general public, including women, children and youth; and
- Opportunity management to leverage government and UN-sponsored meetings and forums to sensitize government officials and stakeholders to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Meanwhile, the Philippines has been participating in the various consultations organised by the UN Statistics Division and the IAEG-SDGI. The Philippines, through its National Statistician, is one of the Co-Chairs of IAEG-SDGI.

It is interesting to note that the level of awareness and interest of Filipinos on SDGs is rather high. In her speech, Ola Almgren¹⁴, the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the Philippines, informed that when the UN conducted MY World, the global survey on people's priorities and views to begin the process of defining the post-2015 Agenda, more than 100,000 of the 8.5 million respondents were Filipinos. This level of awareness is likely the result of the participatory and communicative processes that the country undertakes in bringing down global agreements to national and local levels.

¹³ Approval was supposedly March 2015, but there have been delays.

¹⁴ <http://www.ph.undp.org/content/philippines/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2015/10/23/the-formulation-process-of-the-sustainable-development-goals-and-un-support.html>

3.3 Institutional coordinating and monitoring mechanism for SDGs

The third and equally important component of the preparatory and implementation processes is the creation or identification of the body or mechanism that will facilitate, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation process. This element is slightly complicated at this point inasmuch as there have been long-standing and mandated mechanisms for each and every SDG, sometimes even within one SDG. Fortunately, the country has made various adjustments in the past in order to improve coordination and minimise overlaps.

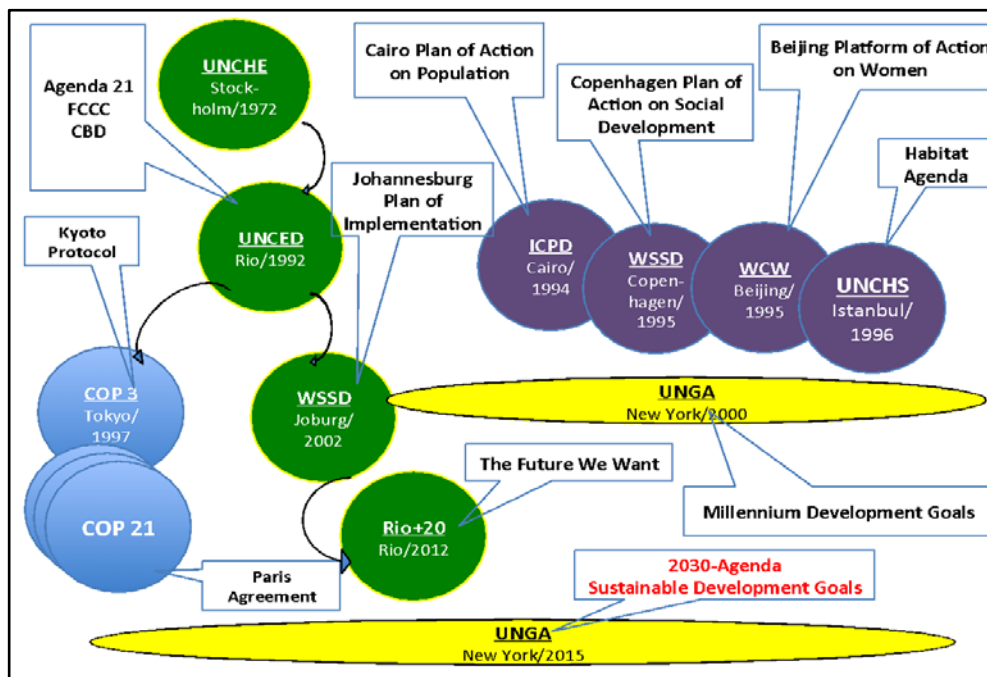
As in most countries, the Philippines has separate institutional mechanisms for global commitments like the MDGs, climate change and the Rio process. Figure 1¹⁵ shows some key global summits in the 1990s, their follow-up summits in the 2000s, and their respective outcome documents, which laid the foundation for the SDGs. Each global summit necessitated the creation of national mechanisms to implement agreements and monitor progress of implementation. As the number of summits grew, the national institutional framework became complicated.

A simplified version of the current institutional landscape for SDGs in the Philippines is presented in Figure 2. It consists of the following:

- Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). This was created as a multi-stakeholder body in September 1992, making it the very first national council for sustainable development that was created after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. It has been restructured twice: in 1995 to increase membership given the wide variety of issues it was tackling; and in 2001 to cut the number of government representatives while increasing the number of sub-committees and expanding government representation in those sub-committees. This second restructuring was in line with the over-all streamlining of the bureaucracy and to minimize inter-agency involvements of ministers so that they can focus on the day-to-day demands of their jobs. A recent study on PCSD effectiveness led to the drafting of an executive fiat that would again expand representation from the government in order to strengthen PCSD and its ability to respond to socioeconomic and political developments at the national and global levels, including the monitoring of nationally-determined SDGs.

¹⁵ The figure does not show anymore other follow-up conferences as well as other global initiatives such as Green Growth, Poverty Reduction Strategies, Financing for Development, etc.

Figure 1. Global Summits and Outcome Documents: The SDG Foundation



Source: Antonio (2016)

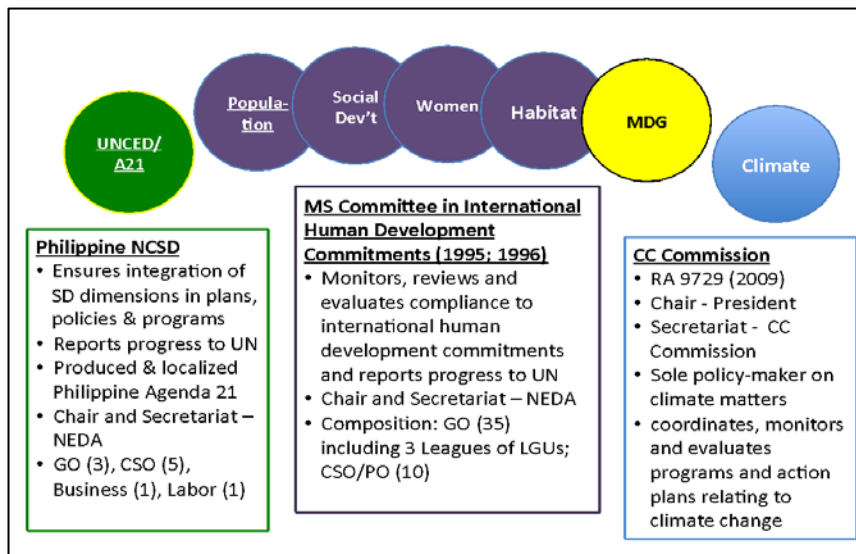
- **Committee on International Human Development Commitments (CIHDC)** is the result of the consolidation and streamlining of the various mechanisms for the social and human development summits to eliminate redundancy and improve implementation efficiency. The CIHDC is a multi-stakeholder body, which has been leading the monitoring and review of compliance to MDGs and other human development commitments.¹⁶ It operates under the auspices of the Social Development Committee of the NEDA Board, which advises the President and the NEDA Board on policies and programs concerning social and human development that includes the MDGs.
- **Climate Change Commission (CCC)** was formed in 2009 through a law in order to strengthen the country's response to climate change. It is a government body that is the sole policy-maker on climate matters.

These institutions largely deal with crosscutting issues that tend to overlap. Hence, it is imperative that they improve coordination and cooperation among each other to promote synergy and efficiency. It is propitious that PCSD and CIHDC have the same Chairperson - the Secretary of Socio-Economic Planning and Director-General of NEDA - and the same Secretariat - the NEDA. In view of these, coordination between PCSD and CIHDC has not been a major problem. Meanwhile, the PCSD and CCC are both looking at closely related, hence overlapping, issues. Their coordination with each other is happening through planning and programming processes, and representation and participation in global discourses. On the other hand, CCC and CIHDC work together also

¹⁶ Includes Cairo Programme of Action, Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, Beijing Platform for Action, and Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and HABITAT Agenda.

through the NEDA planning processes and engage on other areas of mutual concern (e.g. disaster risk reduction and response).

Figure 2. The Philippine Major SDG Institutional Mechanisms



Source: Antonio (2016)

This Philippine institutional framework for sustainable development has been working but is far from perfect. There remain weaknesses in coordination, cooperation, synergy, capacity and funding that must be addressed to effectively implement the 2030 Development Agenda. The government is currently reviewing these mechanisms to make them more responsive to the demands of the new agenda. The main objective is to strengthen coordination among PCSD, CCC and CIHDC; among government ministries; among sector units within the over-all coordinating ministry, i.e. the NEDA; between government and stakeholders; between national and local levels, and among stakeholders engaged in the follow up of global agreements and processes.

4. National Implementation Framework

Section 3 describes the three elements of the SDG preparatory process. These same elements make up the national implementation framework with some refinements and additions, the details of which have yet to be firmed up.

4.1 National Level

At the national level, implementation will consist of mainstreaming the SDGs in the PDP, 2017-2022; solidifying the SDG coordinating and monitoring mechanism; and conducting an information and communication campaign. It is likely that the PDP formulation and implementation process as described in Section 2 would become the implementation framework for SDGs. It consists of producing PDP, 2017-2022 that stands on nationally-relevant SDGs and is infused with internally-consistent SDG targets; preparing the Public Investment Program and Results Matrix; budgeting for the PDP; implementation by concerned agencies, sectors, bodies, etc. in collaboration with business, civil society and other key stakeholders; regular monitoring and evaluation using the

Results Matrix; and mid-term (after 3 years) adjustment or updating of the PDP as necessary. This process repeats itself every six years, hence three PDPs will be prepared throughout the timeframe of the current SDGs, i.e. until 2030. The Philippines must stay the course through the PDPs during the period and Filipino 2040 will help ensure that.

The SDG coordinating and monitoring mechanism, which will be led by PCSD/NEDA, could be in the form of a composite team consisting of the PCSD, CIHDC and CCC. It will facilitate and coordinate the implementation of SDGs and regularly conduct monitoring to inform authorities and policymakers of progress and adjustments in strategies, targets and action programmes as necessary. It will be responsible for ensuring participation of stakeholders in the entire process and in regularly informing the public of progress on SDG implementation. In addition, NEDA normally establishes a multi-stakeholder planning structure that consists of a national Steering Committee and sectoral sub-committees. Committee members include representatives from all sectors and stakeholders, including civil society groups, business, academe and legislature. This is one of its major means of undertaking a holistic planning approach and ensuring stakeholder participation in PDP formulation. The other means are the replication of these planning committees at the regional (administrative) level and the conduct of nationwide consultations.

In support of the monitoring and reporting work for SDGs, the Philippine Statistical Development Program ensures that PSA will collect data that would be needed for nationally-relevant SDG indicators, and would secure funding for said activity. It also provides for the creation of a web-based SDG Watch – a compendium of SDG-related data that will be regularly updated for public consumption. In addition, government plans to install an SDG Focal Point in each concerned agency to facilitate the coordination of SDG-related policies and data.

Meanwhile, NEDA is receiving technical assistance from UNDP Philippines for the adoption of a common approach for effective and coherent support in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which is also known as **MAPS** (Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support). This approach focuses on policy coherence and multi-stakeholder engagement, paying special attention to the crosscutting elements of partnerships, data and accountability. It has three components:

- Mainstreaming refers to integrating the 2030 Agenda into national, sub-national, and local plans and ensuring that the budget allocations for said plans.
- Acceleration refers to targeting national (and UN) resources at priority areas identified in the mainstreaming process, paying special attention to synergies and trade-offs across sectors (reflecting the integrated nature of the agenda), bottlenecks, financing and partnerships, and measurement; and
- Policy Support is about making sure that the skills and expertise held in the UN development system is made available in a timely way and at the lowest cost possible.

Across the three components of MAPS, the UN seeks to build and facilitate partnerships, improve data, and deepen accountability.

Development institutions have also re-aligned their country programmes with the 2030 Agenda. The assistance of these institutions would thus ensure that the Philippine programmes and initiatives are responsive to the SDGs. One example is the plan of the World Food Program to undertake a strategic assessment of the food and hunger situation in the country in order to guide the development of the successor PDP and all other relevant agenda for SDG 2.

4.2 Sector Level

Incorporating the SDG in the PDP starts at the sectoral level. The PDP preparation requires substantive inputs from the various sectors in terms of their current state and respective priorities, strategies and programs. The adaptation of sector-specific SDGs and targets in sector plans must thus commence immediately. It is incumbent upon sectors to prepare well for the PDP formulation by aligning the sector plans with the SDGs. The sectors are subsequently expected to revisit and fine-tune their respective plans and targets based on the approved PDP.

SDG implementation is largely undertaken at the sector level. The sectors could implement better through the preparation and application of coherent public investment programmes, results matrix and budget forecasts that are consistent with the sector plans. The sectors are able to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs through their respective programmes and projects, which could be funded through the budgets, partnership with the private sector and other external sources. Through the results matrix, the sectors are expected to periodically report progress and recommend necessary actions.

The government line agencies will take the lead at the sector level but it is understood that their respective planning, budgeting, implementation and M&E processes will be participatory. These agencies are supported by and also draw inputs from their respective local branches nationwide.

4.3 Local Level

NEDA, through the NEDA regional offices (NRO), replicates the planning process at the regional level. The Regional Development Councils (RDCs) make up a permanent and legally-organised multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral body, and this serves as the Steering Committee. Their sub-committees serve as the sector planning bodies. As in the sector level, the NROs, which also functions as the Secretariat to the RDCs, coordinate regional planning and provide substantive inputs to the PDP formulation based on M&E reports on previous regional development plans and inputs from regional sector agencies and local government units (LGUs). They contribute to the preparation of the national investment program and results matrix by providing regional perspectives, as well as assist in undertaking plan consultations. The Local Government Code requires LGUs to regularly prepare and implement a 3-year Comprehensive Development Plan and 10-year Comprehensive Land-Use Plan. The LGUs contribute to the Regional PDPs based on these plans.

Upon completion of the PDP, the RDCs, with support from the NROs, undertake respective regional planning, including the preparation of regional investment programmes and results matrix. In this process, regional offices of sectoral agencies and LGUs within each region participate and provide inputs and ideas. Parallel to this regional process, regional sector agencies also provide regional inputs to their mother agencies, which in turn feed these into the national PDP formulation. Sub-national level actions are critical to the pursuit of the SDGs. These actions are ensured through the local programmes and projects that operationalise the strategies in the national and local plans. Financing these programmes and projects must thus be ensured.

5. Means of Implementation

5.1 Financing

The Philippines has already been tapping various financing sources to pursue national development goals expressed in the current PDP. As Section 2 shows, these goals and the human, economic and environmental development programmes that pursue them are already directly aligned with the SDGs. Its current main source of financing is the national budget, which doubled in six years from PHP1.54 trillion in 2010 to PHP3.002 trillion in 2016¹⁷ because of the country's rapidly expanding economy. Consequently, the budgets for social protection and human development programmes have reached all-time highs.

Education, which has always been the highest priority sector, accounted for 16.2% or PHP487.5 billion of the budget. Of this amount, 65% goes to basic education. Social protection receives a share of 11.9% or PHP356.2 billion. This amount is distributed to 4Ps¹⁸ (PHP62.7 billion), old age pension (PHP115.2 billion), and housing development (PHP32.5 billion). The 4Ps is the country's flagship poverty alleviation programme, which now covers about 4.6 million household-beneficiaries. In 2007, the 4Ps started with just PHP4.0 million to support 6,000 households. According to the initial study of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the agency managing this program, 1.5 million households or an equivalent of 7.5 million Filipinos had already been lifted above the poverty line because of the 4Ps. Unfortunately, natural disasters tend to undo efforts to alleviate poverty so a big part of the budget (PHP38.9 billion) was allocated to disaster risk reduction and management. Other regular human development and social protection programmes include the National Community-Driven Development Program¹⁹ (PHP10.9 billion to empower 13,357 barangays), supplementary feeding programme (PHP693 million for about 2.2 million children), health insurance for poor families (PHP15.4 million), and many other programmes covering mothers, children, livelihood, etc.

It should be mentioned that the expansion in the economy and the subsequent increases in the budgets for sustainable development programmes came about due to an honest and prudent approach to governance that enabled needed policy reforms and ensured strong macroeconomic fundamentals were in place. This, in turn, led to strong confidence for local and foreign direct investments. Curbing corruption, plugging budget leaks and addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies freed up substantial resources that were eventually used for development programmes. The government did not have to increase taxes for these purposes.

¹⁷ All data on the 2016 National Budget provided herein were taken from the Government of the Philippines website: <http://www.gov.ph/2015/09/04/the-proposed-peoples-budget-for-2016/>

¹⁸ This stands for *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program, which is a conditional cash transfer program that serves as the centerpiece program for poverty alleviation and covers education, maternal health, environmental education, etc.

¹⁹ Locally called KALAHI-CIDSS, this program allows communities to directly access and participate in planning, budgeting and execution of their own-selected projects.

Another key source of funding for pursuing SDGs is private investments, which as previously mentioned, have been due to increased confidence. These investments have been creating decent and remunerative jobs, improving economic productivity, and building infrastructure, among others. For private investments in government programmes, especially in social infrastructure, the government has been strongly promoting and facilitating public-private partnerships (PPP). As of June 2015, the current government had awarded 10 projects worth USD4.2 billion; was bidding out 12 projects that included five regional airports, one prison facility, and a port modernisation; and had over 50 projects in the pipeline²⁰.

Official Development Assistance (ODA), both in terms of concessional loans and grants, continues to be a major source of financing for Philippine development programmes. It should remain so over the SDG timeframe inasmuch as the Philippines still needs to steadily and sustainably grow its economy over at least 10 years and strengthen its resilience to political, economic and financial shocks in order to bring most of its poor population (estimated at 25%) out of poverty. It must also reduce its population's exposure to risks posed by climate change impacts and build resilience to natural disasters that have been occurring more frequently and displacing poor people. ODA to the Philippines has been significant and has helped the country attain some of the MDGs as indicated in the following highlights of CY 2014 ODA Portfolio Review²¹ produced by NEDA:

- As of December 2014, the total ODA Portfolio amounted to USD14.4 billion. This consists of 76 loan projects amounting to USD11.2 billion and 449 grant projects amounting to USD3.2 billion.
- 34 infrastructure programs/projects accounted for 39% or USD4.3 billion of the loans portfolio. Social Reform and Community Development (SRCD) had the second largest share of USD2.7 billion (24%) for 11 programs/projects.
- For the grants portfolio, the SRCD dominated with 37% share (USD1.2 billion) for 151 projects. Governance and institutions development came second at USD793.7 million for 90 projects.
- Of the total ODA portfolio, 98 programs/projects costing PHP262.6 billion supported the achievement of the MDGs. Eighteen programmes/projects were geared towards the achievement of MDG 7 (Ensuring Environmental Sustainability) while 17 were for the attainment of MDG 1 (Eradicate Extreme Poverty).
- 70 loans and grants with total cost of PHP187.8 billion have components related to climate adaptation and mitigation, and to disaster risk reduction and management.

It is expected that ODA will strongly support programmes and projects leading to SDG achievement.

5.2 Capacity

The Philippines still has many capacity inadequacies that must be addressed in order to achieve the SDGs. In fact, the failure to achieve some MDG targets could be traced to some of these inadequacies. Examples are lack of competencies in climate change adaptation, renewable energy generation and disaster management, as well as lack of ability to deliver basic social infrastructure

²⁰ Speech of the PPP Center Executive Director in June 2015 in USA. <http://ppp.gov.ph/?speeches=opening-speech-of-executive-director-canilao-at-the-us-investment-and-infrastructure-roadshow>

²¹ <http://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CY2014-ODA-Review-Overall-ao-30-June-2015-for-printing-FINAL.pdf>

and services. ODA is a potent means to build capacities because most ODA-funded projects invariably have capacity building components and grants are usually used to conduct capacity building programmes. ODA is also a means for the country to tap skills and generate knowledge from other countries either on North-South or South-South or Triangular cooperation. This is another important reason why ODA must be sustained in the Philippines.

On the other hand, the Philippines has built a good level of skills and knowledge in certain areas that it could share with other countries. Examples include various aspects of information technology; geothermal and hydro power generation; public administration and governance (planning, public investment programming, participatory governance, etc.); environmental management (e.g. payment for environmental services), etc. ODA could assist in tapping Filipino expertise through the above-mentioned modes to help build capacities in other countries.

5.3 Technology

Technology is generally provided through direct foreign investments although government, academia and domestic investors have also been robustly developing or adapting their own technology needs. In view of these, the Philippines has high technological content and expertise in certain industries (e.g. food, mining) and services (e.g. information technology, power generation). It has been in the forefront of quite a number of technology areas that promote environment-friendliness. For instance, as a world-class business process outsourcing centre, the country has been using and developing technologies (e.g. mobile app, start-up technologies) that contribute to cuts in travel costs and improvements in operational efficiencies in businesses worldwide. As the second largest global producer of geothermal power and significant generator of hydro, solar and wind power, the country has developed wide expertise in renewable energy generation and solar chip production. It has developed and adapted atmospheric and geophysical analysis and monitoring technologies that help protect lives and natural resources.

Notwithstanding the above, the Philippines is still lagging behind some neighbours in technology development and innovation. One major reason is its much lower spending for research and development (R&D). It must thus optimise international cooperation and leverage its expertise in certain technology areas to access and develop environment-friendly technologies at lower costs.

6. Key challenges for implementing the

SDGs

6.1 Development Challenges

Previous sections indicate that the level of readiness to pursue and achieve the MDGs is fairly good. In fact, the chances are great if the country is able to surmount key development challenges that have been placing a drag on development and undoing meaningful outcomes of appropriate policies and programs of government. Some of these are the following:

- **Natural disaster risks.** The Philippines is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, ranking second in the 2014 World Risk Index and fifth in the 2015 Global Climate Risk Index (first

in 2013). It ranked third in exposure but ranked 69 in adaptive capacity and 56 in coping capacity among about 188 countries. In the last 65 years, the cyclones that visited the Philippines averaged 20 per year with 1993 having the highest record of 32 visits.²² Weather events due to climate impacts have become bigger and stronger as shown by Typhoon Haiyan, which claimed at least 6,000 lives and destroyed properties and critical infrastructure, and the on-going intense El Nino phenomenon, which has raised to high levels the incidence of hunger in many parts of the country. Both events are the worst in history. Other climate phenomena that have lately become apparent are sea level rise and tornado occurrences. Meanwhile, 18 of 37 volcanoes in the Philippines are active and these either erupt or become unsettled from time to time. These natural phenomena cause various forms of disasters that kill or displace people and destroy properties and livelihoods. Apart from the losses, resources for other development objectives are oftentimes redirected to rescue and rehabilitation operations.

- **Peace and order risks.** Peace especially in Southern Philippines has been elusive and several armed groups continue to exist. At least one of these groups has aligned with ISIS. Armed skirmishes occur from time to time and usually displacing a big number of families. Such displacement generates issues that are the direct concerns of the SDGs such as loss of jobs and livelihood; deepening poverty; children dropping out of school and becoming malnourished; loss of proper sanitation; spread of diseases; abuse of girls, etc. Some armed groups resort to criminality such as kidnapping for ransom and extortion or violence against business establishments. These sow fear and lead to a drop in tourism and investments, which could have contributed to the creation of jobs and livelihood for the people.
- **Political risks.** The ups and downs in the Philippine economic and overall development are strongly influenced by governance and leadership. There were leaders who had commitment to pursue their socio-economic agenda but did not have the will to implement it without being influenced by partisan politics. The current leadership earned the confidence and support of many, including the international community such that socioeconomic development is on the uptick. However, national leaders change every six years and the current one will end middle of this year (2016). There is a risk that the successor leaderships/administration (three sets within the life of SDGs) would have a different set of priorities, policies and programmes that could offset the gains generated under previous leadership.
- **Geography and access.** The country's more than 7,000 islands and big areas with mountainous topography makes up one of its greatest development challenges. People in far-flung islands and mountainous areas could not readily be reached by social services nor could they undertake productive activities as they are too far from markets. A massive infrastructure programme must be undertaken to reach its poor and marginalised population in order to achieve the SDGs. PPP and ODA must be maximised for this purpose.

6.2 Implementation challenges

Implementation challenges stem from the development challenges and include the key components of the Means of Implementation (MoI) - financing and capacity building.

²² Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration. www.pagasa.gov.ph

- **Financing.** Previous discussion on financing shows that the Philippine government has already been funding many programmes and projects that are critical to the pursuit of the SDGs through national budget outlays, ODA and PPPs. However, it is also clear from its MDG performance and its high vulnerability to climate impacts that the level of financial inputs is still inadequate for the actual needs of the country. There has been no actual estimate yet on the actual financial requirements to attain the SDGs but the following examples of expense items may provide insight and perspective: 1) infrastructure development to provide social and economic services to island and mountain municipalities, improve conditions in megacities urbanising towns and cities, and facilitate production and commerce; 2) protection and adaptation to climate change impacts such as those previously discussed; 3) lifting some 25 million people above the poverty line.
- **Capacity.** Inadequate capacities, especially in government as a whole and among LGUs, is a sizable stumbling block for achieving the SDGs. Some areas of capacity strengths and weaknesses were already mentioned. At the local level the administration and delivery of basic services were devolved to the LGUs under the Local Government Code. These services – health, agriculture, social welfare, environmental protection and maintenance of public works and highways – are critical to the achievement of almost all of the SDGs. Unfortunately, capacity deficiencies in LGUs come in almost all forms such as in skills in administration and delivery of health and social welfare services; human resources to undertake environmental protection; and financial resources to maintain roads and highways.
- **Access.** Infrastructure development and capacity building will take a long time, especially if resources do not come as needed. As such, access will remain a major implementation issue at least in the immediate future. This means that those who deliver services will continue to have difficulty reaching far-flung areas; school buildings and health centres in these same areas will take time to build and become operational; production value chains will take time to develop; etc.
- **Data and Statistics.** These are critical elements to the SDG achievement process, particularly in the M&E of progress of implementation. Unfortunately, the capacity to collect and analyse relevant data and statistics at all levels and sectors is wanting.
- **Leadership and Governance.** These will spell the success or failure of implementation. Among others, a committed leader will work to close the financing and capacity gaps; ensure that all government instrumentalities are coordinating as a team and within a timeframe; provide the mechanism and inspiration for stakeholders, including external development institutions, to work in harmonious and coordinated fashion; and ensure that progress is closely monitored and provide proper advice to policymakers and planners through timely and accurate data and statistics. Unfortunately, finding the right leader is always uncertain due to electoral issues.

7. Overcoming key challenges

The above-cited challenges are generally inter-related and inter-connected so these must be viewed and addressed collectively.

- Leadership and governance is the key to overcoming all challenges cited above. Political will is an imperative. This is often difficult to find in a leader given the political environment in the country. However, reinforcing current multi-stakeholder support and coordinating mechanisms

could help future leaders stay focused on improving the quality of lives of the Filipino people through the achievement of the SDGs. Future government leaders must sustain the commitment of the current government administration to SDGs. They must ensure the mainstreaming of the SDGs in successor plans at all levels and continuously mobilise resources to implement the plans. They must strengthen the policy environment and mechanisms for ODA, PPP and other possible sources such as payment for environmental services. They must further strengthen and sustain the growth of the economy to enlarge the budgets for SDG-supported programmes.


- The coordinating mechanism, the PCSD, must be strengthened in form, authority, financial resources and overall capability to lead the SDG process towards fruition. With clear instructions from the President and effective orchestration by the PCSD, all relevant government agencies and stakeholder organisations at all levels must work as a team. In addition, “SDG champions” must be identified and encouraged to serve as mobilisers and inspirations.
- The passing of the law that created the PSA to consolidated all statistical bodies, processes and resources was a big step forward. In addition, PSA must be provided with adequate financial resources and capacity to support the data and M&E requirements of the SDG achievement process.
- Popular participation is likewise a key element to SDG implementation. Such participation must cover the whole planning cycle starting with strategy formulation up to M&E and reporting. The people must become partners in development, not just beneficiaries of programmes and projects. Information must flow and two-way communication must be the norm. This paradigm will be useful in addressing access as community people can undertake own planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of projects they determined by themselves. They can also help in delivering basic services.

8. Conclusion

The Philippines has already established a good foundation for pursuing and achieving the SDGs. This resulted from the continuing application of the MDG process and experience, and to the high relevance and priority of issues covered by the SDGs to national development. Among others, the following to strengthen this foundation:

- Current integration of practically all 17 SDGs in PA 21 and PDP, 2010-2016.
- Strong commitment of government, as stated in the UN General Assembly, to incorporate the SDGs in development plans and strategies, foremost of which are Filipino 2040, PDP 2017-2020, and local plans.
- Existence and undergoing improvement of a national institutional framework, which has local level network.
- Well established participatory framework and process, and good level of SDG awareness
- Incorporation of SDGs in the 2016 budget with ample allocations for crucial programmes.
- Significant levels of ODA that are funding programmes and projects that address SDG-related issues.

Barring unforeseen and uncontrollable extreme events such as severe global financial crisis, run-away oil prices and serious conflicts within the country or the region, the Philippines will:

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- **attain the SDGs** if it stays on its current development course and intensifies efforts and programmes to overcome development challenges;
 - **have mixed achievements** if it keeps to the current level of action or remains in a business-as-usual mode; or
 - **fail miserably** if contradictory policies and programmes are introduced, resulting in a reversal of current gains.

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