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Mindanao: Economic Needs and Educational Planning¹

ISMAEL VELOSO

AT no time has Mindanao needed the attention of both government and people more urgently than today. In the past the attention of the government as regards Mindanao was directed largely towards the peace and order situation. The history of Mindanao has been largely identified with the wars with the Moros, with the result that the problems of Mindanao were largely considered to be military. Now that the wars between Christians and Moros are over, there are other problems with regard to Mindanao which must be faced.

The influx of new settlers into Mindanao has been enormous. They have settled in our valleys and on our plains. They have swollen our sitios into barrios, our barrios into towns. They have brought with them greater activity and greater progress. They have also brought greater problems. It might be well to outline a basic program for the agricultural and economic development of Mindanao in the light of which the educational planners can be guided in their attempts to prescribe for the educational problems of Mindanao.

The first things needed in Mindanao are roads. We need roads to the interior plains and valleys. This will assure the

¹ Paper read at the Seminar on Home and Community Education conducted under the auspices of the Ateneo de Cagayan at Cagayan de Oro City, 23-25 November 1956. The author is congressman from Davao.

inflow of population, especially of farmer-pioneers to the fertile lands in the interior. We congressmen from Mindanao are happy to state that in the House of Representatives the chairman of the committee on public works is one of our Mindanao colleagues, the Hon. Cesar Fortich of Bukidnon. This is a step towards the realization of our fond dreams of better and more roads here.

Second, in making new subdivision of public land, at least 100 but not more than 250 hectares must be reserved for barrio and town sites along national highways and provincial roads. These town sites should be about 10 kilometers apart. These will become eventually sizeable communities envisioned by the National Urban Planning Commission.

Third, we must reserve for every town a certain portion not exceeding 1,000 hectares of forest area to be made into municipal communal forests. These will provide a continuous lumber supply for the individual family needs within the community. The indiscriminate cutting of our forest timber with no plan to provide for the increasing needs of the community in the future (as is being done now) is criminal. Floods are recurrent due to excessive deforestation.

Fourth, we plan the establishment of municipal nurseries to distribute seeds and fertilizer. As a help to farmers many of whom are unschooled in agricultural methods these municipal nurseries could conduct demonstrations in methods of cultivation, harvesting, crop-curing, etc. The nursery personnel could disseminate much valuable technical information by periodic visits to farmers.

Fifth, the government must establish at strategic places in all the provinces breeding stations to propagate new stock of animals by crossbreeding and by artificial insemination. These stations can also demonstrate ways of controlling and preventing the spread of disease. We must educate the people of Mindanao in the promotion of backyard herding and husbandry as is being practiced in Switzerland and other small European countries with scanty forage supply. The Batangas type of home grazing and herding should be recommended to

all while extensive cattle-raising must be given full financial encouragement. The production of milk and milk by-products should be promoted. This must be treated as a new industry with the objective of eventually reducing the millions of pesos spent on dairy imports.

Sixth, fish culture both in seas and in inland waters must be financed and promoted. The marshy areas in Mindanao are potential fish pond reserves for bangus and other commercial fish. The establishment of fishery schools is urgently needed to train the people in the techniques of fish preserving and canning. This would save dollars for our people who are now spending a great deal of money on imported salmon and sardines. The government canning factory in Malabon for bangus sardines is an indication that the fish canning industry properly directed can be successful here.

Seventh, we must establish in Iligan and in Cagayan de Oro or their environs private or government smelting plants for steel and iron industries by utilizing the cheap electric power of Maria Cristina. A country cannot succeed in industry without a plentiful supply of steel and iron. The Philippines has mines of iron, copper, manganese, chromium and other metals but must send these raw materials abroad for processing. These metals return to us in the form of manufactured or finished products at prohibitive prices. Our country in consequence has become a mere provider of raw materials and a necessary absorber of the finished and processed product. There is a need to change our course in this regard.

Eighth, we must be ever zealous about our lumber industry. What we do today is wasteful. We cut down as many logs as possible and sell them fast to Japan and America to take advantage of the great profits in dollars. We have disregarded the matter of conservation of our timber reserves for future generations. The lumber industry in all phases can be fully developed here through the establishment of more saw mills and machinery for the manufacture of plywood, wall-boards, veneers, boxes and toys. This is what Japan is doing with the lumber that she is importing from us. In this instance we are again merely providing the raw materials when we could

do the processing and manufacture the finished product ourselves. By merely exporting logs we do indeed earn dollars but we are not providing jobs.

Ninth, we must discover the industrial uses of our coconuts. Northern Mindanao is a coconut region. While advanced countries have discovered modern techniques for utilizing our copra and oil for making butter, soap and very recently also coconut flour, our agricultural experts and industrial pioneers have failed to take advantage of these techniques. We have not acquired the necessary machinery for the manufacture of coconut by-products. Such manufacture would provide jobs and would cut down imports.

Tenth, mining should be encouraged. All the provinces of Mindanao have vast mining possibilities. Our private capital might well be siphoned to the opening of new mines and the continued exploitation of the present productive ones. There is a world demand for our mining products as there is need for our increased industries. This is the reason why the government has earmarked ₱20,000,000 for the construction of a smelting plant in the city of Iligan.

Eleventh, our agricultural output can be increased by utilizing every plain and valley and hill not otherwise suited to the production of our export crops but utilizable instead for such staple food as rice and corn. I hate to see or hear of our country spoken of as rich in soil, favored with an ideal climate and abundant rainfall and blessed with natural waters, creeks and cataracts and yet still hungry for rice and corn. Every year we import from other countries more than ₱50 million worth of rice alone. Mindanao's plains and valleys if harnessed to the full can produce all the rice our whole nation needs.

Twelfth, more study is needed regarding the planting of other crops needed for home industries. I refer to cotton, coffee, cacao, soy beans, potatoes, garlic and onions. In this wise the Department of Agriculture could intensify the campaign by charting our weather conditions, analyzing the soil capacity and thus promoting the so-called intermediate agricultural crops to feed our young industrial plants as well as supply the

daily needs of housewives. Cotton which can be raised in this region must be given more scientific study and experiment so as to obtain fuller information to suit farm production.

Mindanao is nature's paradise. It is an agricultural reserve. We have the land and the natural resources. Perhaps what we lack are the men. We are still graduating thousands of lawyers and other professional men. There are very few farmers properly trained in modern agricultural techniques.

Yet we need such farmers and agriculturists and technicians. We need the plowman to break the soil, the miner to excavate the mines, the logger to topple down the logs and saw them into lumber, the herdsman to increase our animal stock for home consumption. We need the artisan to plan the water canals and construct the water mains, the soil engineer to bring the water and dam our rivers for irrigation. We need the agronomist to chart the crop planting and harvesting. We need the cropper to gather the harvest and place it on the free market. We need the farm manufacturer to discover and exploit the agricultural uses of farm by-products. We need the farm hand to harvest and bale the cotton, abaca, ramie, kenaf, sisal and other fibers. We need the soil chemist to discover the proper fertilizer needed for various places and various plants. We need the veterinarians to prevent the spread of animal disease. We need the technician to transform the barren hillside clay into ceramics. We need the craftsman to utilize our rattan, bamboo, talahib and cogon for the manufacture of baskets, chairs, tables, wall lamps and other goods. All the above are merely phases in that vast field called agriculture.

This type of agriculture requires planning and sound statesmanship. It requires sound educational policies.

OVERCENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATION

Although education in the United States is highly decentralized, the American founders of the Philippine school system established that system on a highly centralized basis. One reason for this was that the Filipinos had been accustomed to a highly centralized government during the Spanish regime, under which they had received their orders from Spain or from Mexico. Moreover, when the system was organized by the Americans, there were almost no Filipino teachers qualified to manage the schools. There seemed at that time to be no alternative to organizing a system with strongly-centralized control and, in the case of the public schools, with highly-centralized administration and supervision as well. The conditions that determined this high degree of centralization have long since ceased to exist in the Philippines, but, from the standpoint of control and from that of administration and supervision, education still remains highly centralized. Furthermore, from the standpoint of financial support, the system is even more highly-centralized than it was before 1939, when a considerable portion of the school revenue was provided by the municipalities.

Education in the Philippines is too highly-centralized; there is need for delegation to the provinces and chartered cities of greater authority and responsibility for the management of their schools.

Report of the Mission to the Philippines
28 July 1949 UNESCO (Paris 1950) pp. 16, 19