

WORKSHOP OUTPUTS: LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

In addition to raising the public's awareness and understanding of the issues and complications of international trade, the forum also aimed to elicit from the participants a number of next steps— policy advocacies, recommendations and future directions to make trade work for the Filipino people.

A number of lessons learned in terms of the major challenges and issues in each of the three basic sectors, as well as recommendations and agenda for the next three years were drawn from our equally engaged participants. Among these were the following:

AGRICULTURE SECTOR

A number of issues and challenges were brought out during the workshop discussion. The weak institutional capability of government agencies and departments as well as the lack of organized database of information that will serve as the guide for agricultural trading are some of the barriers to effective agricultural trade. The swift liberalization of the sector even if there is no concrete development framework also caused alarm to the sector. In addition, the lack of agricultural protection, budget and the poor state of agrarian reform are also causing problems in trade.

Basing from these problems and issues the agriculture sector is facing, solutions were presented which may help make trade in the agriculture much more productive and at the same time more geared towards human development. The lessons learned were the following:

- ❖ There is indeed a need to streamline and strengthen the role of the National Food Authority (NFA), it being a direct link of the government to the agriculture sector.
- ❖ Policies could work better if genuine participatory consultations are conducted and spearheaded by the government. This should be done with all sectors concerned.
- ❖ In order to provide the members of the agriculture sector with advanced knowledge and techniques, thus helping make them more efficient, up-to-date in methods, and more productive, they must be given more trainings and that the government should facilitate for technology transfers through increased support in research and development.
- ❖ There is also the need to improve the agrarian reform efforts of the government. Agrarian reforms should be holistic, meaning it must not stop at

the distribution of lands only, rather the environment upon which the farmer-beneficiary must also be conducive for development.

MANUFACTURING SECTOR

The manufacturing sector likewise put forward certain lessons or recommendations to make the sector more productive and pro- human.

- ❖ In order to address the issue on how to scale the value chain, there is a need to put forth, backward and forward linkaging. State colleges and Universities should tap resources being offered by businesses so that the competitive edge of Filipino products be developed. There must be a linkage that exists between the academe, local industries, and government agencies so that our industrial products would be more competitive in terms of quality and the technology in it.
- ❖ There is also a need to improve the skills and capabilities of those who are working in the informal sector. Likewise, women's skills must also be upgraded and updated since it has been common that they are already engaged in jobs that before were for men only. For the long term, laboratories where employees musty be trained on a hands-on approach, must be set.
- ❖ The high cost of doing business in the Philippines is seen as one of the impediments of Conducting business. High cost of rents, fuel, energy costs, etc, is stopping some businesses to conduct their operations here. One solution to this is to recalibrate the tariff rates of our strategic industries. Sources of alternative technologies that can help lower costs must be considered.

SERVICES SECTOR

- ❖ Indeed, the liberalization of public sector services makes them less accessible to the poor. This has also caused the displacement of certain employees. To answer these trade related issues on services, there must always be consultations with concerned sectors so that alternative solutions can be created in order to allay the fears of employees.
- ❖ In order to better protect overseas employees form possible abuses caused by their employers or recruiting agencies, recruitment activities must be monitored and that offenders must be dealt with prompt action. There is also a need to train women workers in order to increase their competitive advantage over other workers.

- ❖ Salary upgrades and other positive inducements must be given to health care professional in order for the government to induce them to stay.
- ❖ To answer the ballooning unemployment rate due to the lack of skills and necessary trainings for employability, the government must spearhead the initiative to conduct trainings for unskilled or low skilled members of the service sector.