

# UNLOCKING MINDANAO'S POTENTIAL

Philippines Mindanao Jobs Report: A Strategy of Mindanao Development



**R**ich in history and cultural diversity. Abundant natural resources. Home to dynamic agribusiness entrepreneurs. Its key cities among the fastest-growing in the Philippines. Mindanao has what it takes to be among the most dynamic places in the Philippines.

It's only a matter of unlocking its great potential.

A few years ago, the World Bank started working with the Philippine government and stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, people's organizations, and experts from the academe, on a regional development strategy for Mindanao to support the country's development goals. The result of this collaboration is the *Philippines Mindanao Jobs Report: A Strategy of Mindanao Regional Development*.

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The main challenge for Mindanao, like the rest of the Philippines, is how to speed up inclusive growth, or growth that creates more and better jobs and reduce poverty. Reflecting the collective knowledge and wisdom of Mindanao's leaders and stakeholders, the report came up with recommendations around three major development areas, namely:

- Raising the productivity of Mindanao's farm and fisheries sector and improving its access to markets;
- Investing in health, education, skills and social protection for the poor; and
- Addressing the drivers of conflict and strengthening institutions in conflict-affected areas.

**Raising agricultural productivity and improving connectivity to markets.**

Growth and poverty reduction in Mindanao will require making farmers more productive, particularly the smallholders. Better extension and irrigation services will help. Also, farmers and farm workers will have more access to markets if there are adequate and well-maintained rural roads linking them to the buyers of their produce.

Small farmers will have better chances to succeed if they can work with agribusiness firms in penetrating local and global markets. These mutually-beneficial relationships can further flourish if there are more

sustainable sources of electricity, better telecommunications, ports and logistics facilities, and policies that ensure lower costs of shipping Mindanao products to local and global markets.

**Investing in education and skills.**

Government and the business sector can work together to offer scholarships in engineering, sciences, information technology and foreign language skills to address increasing demand from the manufacturing sector, construction, utility, information technology industries, and business process outsourcing.

At the same time, efforts to address low enrolment rates and completion of basic education need to accelerate. Providing training programs for workers who are elementary graduates, linking them to non-formal basic education programs, and improving coordination between livelihood programs and job assistance could make it easier for workers to improve their chances to find gainful employment.

**Addressing the drivers of conflict.**

Achieving inclusive growth in Mindanao can be much more challenging than the rest of the country because of the lingering armed conflict. Hence, addressing the issues that stoke conflict — for instance, land ownership disputes, historical injustices, and weak governance, among others — is an important component in Mindanao's development agenda.



Accelerating efforts to improve land titling and registration, as well as promoting equitable access to land, especially among small farmers, will go a long way in lessening land disputes.

Ultimately, conflict in Mindanao can be resolved by addressing grievances rooted in long-standing political and historical issues. The government has been addressing these issues through the peace process and other initiatives. Improving delivery of social services, and reforming policies to support job creation and economic opportunity for all can further help ensure the success of these peace-building efforts.

In the long-run, progress in the entire country depends on the growth and development in Mindanao.

Because Mindanao holds about a quarter of the country's population but a third of its poor, significantly reducing national poverty hinges on reducing poverty in Mindanao. And because Mindanao is the country's main supplier of farm and fishery products, enhancing productivity there could reduce prices of food and raw materials, and make Philippine products more competitive.

Mindanao's prosperity is the entire country's gain.

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