

# RAPID NEWSMAKERS

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE RURAL AGRO-ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH (DTI-RAPID GROWTH) PROJECT  
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## National Women's Month FEATURE

### A 'SWEET' UNDERTAKING: A WOMAN'S EFFORTS IN SUPPLYING CACAO AND LIVELIHOOD IN DAVAO

Guadalupe 'Aging' Ocial, 65, has been managing the Biao Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Cooperative (BARBCO) for 20 years now. Every day, she leads the operations of the cooperative; plans how to market their products, collaborates and networks with partners and enablers, and resolves concerns about operations.

The Board of Directors chose Aging as one of the Cooperative's pillars where she greatly contributed to the enterprise's success.

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**IN PHOTO:** The 13th NEDA Board Meeting held on January 26 in Malacañang discussing the DTI-RAPID Growth Project's extension (Photo from RTV Malacañang Youtube Channel).

## NEDA BOARD GRANTS RAPID GROWTH PROJECT EXTENSION UNTIL 2027

During the 13th Meeting of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board, the highest body that approves government development plans and projects approved the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) request to continue the implementation of its Rural Agro-enterprise Partnership for Inclusive Development and Growth (RAPID Growth) Project from January 26, 2024 to June 30, 2027 with a financial closing date on December 31, 2027.

(MORE IN PAGE 3)



**IN PHOTO:** Aging Ocial, Manager of BARBCO, shows how they packaged their best-selling *tableya* and other cacao products (Photo by Riz Sunio/RAPID NPCO)





## 1ST NPCO-DILG COORDINATION MEETING HELD FOR RAPID FMI IMPLEMENTATION

As part of RAPID Growth Project's goals to facilitate the physical connectivity of farmers' produce to markets, the first Coordination Meeting for the year between the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Department of Trade and Industry - RAPID Growth Project National Project Coordination Office (NPCO) was held online, February 7.

This coordination meeting is in line with the DTI and DILG Memorandum of Agreement which identified DILG as the implementation partner of the former that will oversee, implement, and monitor the construction of the Farm-to-Market Infrastructure (FMI) subcomponent in the covered regions of the Project.

The meeting became an avenue for both parties to clarify administrative, financial, and operational concerns related to FMI implementation and identification of priority activities for 2024.

Among the priority activities set are the capacity development activities on 1) Construction Performance Evaluation System (CPES), 2) Refresher Training on Road Construction and Maintenance, 3) Seminar-Workshop on Fundamental Concepts of Engineering for Non-engineers; and, 4) Project Risk Management Training.

RAPID-NPCO and DILG agreed on the need to judiciously spend the remaining funds of the Project by prioritizing the implementation of all the FMI-related programmed activities of 2024.

A regular quarterly coordination will also be conducted to strengthen the collaboration and partnership between the two parties in the FMI implementation of the RAPID Growth Project. ###



**IN PHOTO:** Groundbreaking of 1.70km Farm-to-Market Road (FMR) in Sitio Mikit, San Martin, Municipality of Prosperidad, Agusan del Sur, March 14. Prosperidad Mayor Frederick Mark P. Mellana (in white) signs a Memorandum of Agreement with RAPID and DILG to construct the FMI (Photo by Karl Gonzales / RAPID RCU-13).

## RAPID-NPCO GEARS UP FOR 3-MONTH ANNUAL OUTCOMES SURVEY

In preparation for the conduct of the Annual Outcomes Survey (AOS), the RAPID National Project Coordination Office (NPCO) conducted the Orientation of Enumerators for the AOS, February 13-15, Pinnacle Hotel, Davao City.

About 29 male and 33 female personnel and enumerators from the Department of Trade and Industry - Regional Coordination Units (RCUs) and Provincial Coordination Units (PCUs), including NPCO project staff were trained in the use of the survey design, methodology, and data collection devices and tools.

The workshop aimed to ensure the quality of the data collected during the AOS by training the participants in collecting high-quality data and techniques in probing respondents for accurate information, handling various types of responses, and maintaining consistency in data collection procedures.

Aside from the skills in data collection, the participants were also oriented on safety protocols and security measures during the actual surveys.

This will enable enumerators to effectively and efficiently conduct fieldwork in potentially challenging or unfamiliar environments, and prioritize their and their respondents' safety.

The AOS, which is being conducted from February to April 2024 by EMS Management Systems Consulting Services, is expected to determine the perceived changes, both positive and negative, and quantitatively measure the increase or decrease in the levels of productivity, partnership building, and access to various Detailed Investment Plan (DIP) -based value chain of the farmers' and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) during the project implementation.

It also aims to evaluate the Project's targeting efficiency and provide performance information and lessons learned during the data-gathering phase to identify corrective actions to be taken.

The outcome-level results generated in the AOS will serve as a reference to assess the project's progress in achieving its development objectives. ###





(Continued from Page 1, **NEDA Board Grants RAPID Growth Project Extension until 2027**)

In the meeting chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. on January 26, this United Nations - International Fund for Agricultural Development (UN-IFAD)-supported project is foreseen as one of the potential contributors to the socio-economic transformation goal of Eastern Visayas and the entire Mindanao regions as it aims to contribute to the sustainable increase of income of smallholder farmers and unemployed rural men and women across the selected agri-based value chains of cacao, coffee, coconut and processed fruits and nuts.

“With the end of project date extended to June 30, 2027 and with the financial closing date of December 31, 2027, it is estimated that the Project can reach and impact 78,000 farming households and at least 1,050

Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs),” DTI Secretary Fred Pascual said.

The endorsement of the project extension from the respective Regional Development Councils (RDCs) of Eastern Visayas and the entire Mindanao Regions including of the Bangsamoro Economic Development Council of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) to the NEDA Board has significantly contributed to the attainment of the extension.

“Although the project was supposed to end in 2024 and 2025, respectively, the RDC VIII saw the need to support the extension as the implementation of project activities was hobbled by pandemic-related delays. The extension is seen to help improve the agriculture industry in Eastern Visayas which saw declines in recent years,” according to the official release of NEDA Region VIII.

The change in scope of the Farm-to-Market Infrastructure implementation was also provisionally approved by the NEDA Board that will reduce the target length of Farm-to-Market roads from 140 km to 48 km due to increased cost per kilometer of road rehabilitated or improved based on the updated Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) design standards in 2020.

The President directed the NEDA, DTI, and DPWH to reexamine the scope of work to determine the proper targets for rehabilitated and maintained FMIs.

The proposed change in scope, including clarification on the appropriate cost per kilometer, will be submitted to the NEDA Board for approval and referendum.

To date, the result of the DPWH evaluation has been completed and submitted to DTI and NEDA to facilitate this further for NEDA Board action. ###

# RAPID-NPCO EXPLORES COLLABORATION WITH EDC, UN-FAO

The National Project Coordination Office of the RAPID Growth Project conducted a series of meetings with the Education Development Center (EDC) and the United Nations - Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO) to explore collaboration opportunities relative to Social, Environmental, and Climate Adaptation Procedure (SECAP).

On January 24, EDC and DTI-RAPID discussed the establishment of institutional partnership and collaboration in the implementation of activities for the development of the Youth and Indigenous People (IPs) stakeholders of the latter through EDC’s Blue-Green Economy Module and Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Solutions Project.

Both parties are expected to ink a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) to confirm the said collaboration.

EDC is currently implementing a project on empowering communities for racial and environmental justice in

partnership with Opportunity 2.0, a program by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which supports systems in the Philippines to provide second-chance education to 180,000 out-of-school youth across 15 cities that lead to their successful employment and livelihoods.

Some of their ongoing activities are O2 Work Ready Now (WRN) Training, Blue Green Economy (BGE) awareness, waste management, and supporting youth development activities with green activities.

The RAPID-NPCO is also working closely with UN-FAO since Feb 15 for potential collaboration on social inclusion, innovative partnership venture agreements, trainings on disaster risk reduction and climate-smart agriculture, among others.

It is expected that this collaboration will be sealed in the coming months.

FAO is a specialized agency of the



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



Education Development Center

United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger by aiming for food security for all. The organization also implements various interventions in the Philippines.

“Working with partners is being recognized and is seen as a strategic move for the project to fully realize the goals and objectives of the project. As such, we welcome potential partners for collaboration,” DTI-RAPID Deputy Project Director Romeo Castañaga conveyed in one of the meetings conducted with partners. ###



(Continued from Page 1, A 'SWEET' UNDERTAKING):

Her passion and dedication to serving overcame the fear of fighting many legal battles and financial struggles in the past.

Through her leadership, BARBCO has become one of the biggest cacao bean players in Davao Region. To date, the cooperative has provided livelihood to 147 cacao farmers, including the Bagobo Klata indigenous people of Davao, and surrounding provinces.

About 87.5% of its workforce in cacao processing facilities are also composed of women workers who shared in the propagation of the seedlings, as well as in the roasting, cleaning, and processing of the beans.

Most of these women are also mothers and breadwinners who are enabled to earn income for themselves and their families.

Now, the cooperative buys about 5.5 tons of cacao every day from different farmer organizations across Davao Region.

By being strategically located in Davao City where there are several cacao farms and where neighbouring provinces go for commerce and trade, Aging shared that they are able to provide competitive buying price to farmers. BARBCO buys the beans at about Php100 to Php460 per kilo.

The cooperative now has about 24 kinds of cacao products including the traditional tablea, instant champorado, and chocolate bars--which all have Certificates of Product Registration (CPR) and are sold in major groceries in the Davao Region.

Aside from its existing markets, Aging is working to close the deal with a Subic-based buyer. Once the deal is sealed, about five tons of cacao will be bound for Subic.

The unwavering support that Aging and the cooperative leaders provided to their farmers had contributed to raising the Philippine Flag in a cacao international competition.

The cacao beans sample of one of its farmers, Mr. Arthur Lagoc, was sent to Cocoa of Excellence (CoEx) Program in Rome, Italy.

The said sample was acclaimed as one of the Top 50 Best Beans in the world and was awarded as Gold Winner in the prestigious International Cocoa Awards (ICA) 2021, beating more than 53 cocoa-producing countries in the world.

#### But not only for their own gain

But before Aging took the helm of BARBCO as a manager and, in some years, as a member of the Board of Directors, she used to be a manager of the defunct Philippine Cacao Estate Corporation (PCEC) until 1992 when the company closed and distributed their lands to the cacao farmers through the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). BARBCO was then founded.

After the closure, Aging opened her own business which was already doing well. However, BARBCO asked her to lead the, then, the new-born cooperative.

She admitted that there was barely any money from being a manager and a staff at BARBCO. Still, Aging took on the role to help the farmers.

However, taking on the responsibilities of leading BARBCO also entailed having to shoulder the declining finances and many legal battles against them about the rights to the lands they acquired from CARP.

There were also times when she and their members' lives were endangered because of their land and the livelihood that depended on it.

"There had been times when we were threatened. Some of my members were attacked. But even if our situation was difficult, as long as we continued doing the right thing, nothing could make us give up. We'll only become stronger," Aging shared, adding that they never resorted to any extrajudicial decisions and this is why BARBCO still exists and is still united.

#### Growing their business potential further through RAPID Growth

To increase the cooperative's absorbing capacity, DTI-IFAD RAPID Growth Project provided BARBCO four mechanical dryers that can dry up to 500 kilograms each or about 2 tons of beans.

Aging shared that there are times when the fields become flooded and drying the beans under the sun almost seems impossible. The dryers also do not contaminate the beans with smoke.

"The dryers were a big help to our enterprise, especially since our capital outlays for such equipment are hefty. The quality of our beans has also become better, especially on rainy days," said Godofredo Rangas, chair of BARBCO's Board of Directors.







### Mature Cooperatives mentoring smaller associations

As the 'older' cooperative, Aging shared that they have been helping smaller organizations and extending aid to others at every opportunity they can find.

Through DTI-IFAD RAPID Growth Project, BARBCO was also introduced to SAWATA Farmers Organization when the two organizations underwent training on cacao production, processing, and marketing. They have then been helping SAWATA ever since.

They have also been connected to Southern Davao Multipurpose Cooperative and UNICARBI Multipurpose Cooperative who sold their beans to BARBCO.

Aging commented that they are grateful for the opportunity to connect with other cooperatives and help the smaller ones in what they coined as a 'hand-holding' approach.

BARBCO has been providing seedlings to the smaller organizations. They also granted them loans for additional capital and taught them the basic processes of running a cooperative such as issuing vouchers.

"I'm no longer inclined to monetary gains. Whatever I will need, God will provide. What is important is to help others," Aging shared. ###



**IN PHOTO:** BARBCO women workers manually roasted their dried cacao, remove debris, and then cook and process the beans to turn it into the people's favorite chocolate products (Photo by Gelyn Sanchez-Llana / RAPID NPCO).

## RAPID GROWTH PROJECT REORGANIZES; NEW PROJECT OFFICIALS DESIGNATED

In relation to the issuance of DTI Department Order 24-10 on January 24 which provides for the organizational regrouping of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the DTI Department Order No.24-57 entitled "Designation of Supervising Undersecretary Project Director, Deputy Project Director, and Updating of Project Implementation Structure of the RAPID Growth Project" was issued on March 21.

Through this D.O, the Project Implementation Structure (PIS) is updated, and the new project officials are mandated to oversee, implement, and manage the RAPID Growth Project starting this year.

The Project, which was lodged under the DTI-Regional Operations Group (DTI-ROG), is now placed directly under the DTI Office of the Secretary (DTI-OSEC) with Undersecretary Ana

Carolina P. Sanchez as the newly designated Supervising Undersecretary. Consequently, the supervision of the National Project Coordination Office (NPCO) of the Project, is transferred from DTI-ROG to DTI-OSEC.

The DTI-ROG, as part of the project management support group, will continue to provide administrative and facilitative support to the RAPID Growth Project.

Regional Director Flora D. Politud-Gabunales of DTI - 12 Regional Office, was designated as the new National Project Director in view of the retirement of then National Project Director Maria Belenda Q. Ambi of DTI-11 Regional Office. DTI-11's Acting Regional Director Romeo L. Castañaga was retained as the Deputy National Project Director of RAPID.

"I and Director Castañaga will work hand-in-hand in providing overall guidance to the project, managing the financial and administrative aspects, and most especially in overseeing the operations of the project so that our development objective will be achieved in the next three years," Director Gabunales shared in one of the meetings attended with the NPCO.

Aside from the PIS updating, the NPCO had also undergone restructuring of its organizational structure to promote a more strategic, efficient, and effective operations in line with the agreed actions of the last Partial Supervision and Implementation Support Mission conducted with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). ###





This  
**NATIONAL**  
*Women's Month,*

**DTI-IFAD RAPID  
GROWTH PROJECT**

*celebrates*

Every **woman** who leads homes and businesses, big or small;

Every **woman** who nurtures the land and their families;

Every **woman** who provides for their households and supplies the needs of the community and the country; and

Every **woman** who serves as catalysts and envoys for change and development.

**To the wonderful women  
entrepreneurs, farmers,  
development workers, and leaders,  
Happy Women's Month!**

Your dedication, resilience, and hard work inspire us to break barriers, shatter stereotypes, and pave the way for a more inclusive and equal world.

*Thank you!*



The Rural Agro-Enterprise Partnership for Inclusive Development and Growth (RAPID Growth) Project implemented by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) aims to increase the income level of small farmers and unemployed rural women and men across selected agri-based value chain through collaborative and commercial partnerships, expansion of off-farm and on-farm activities, supporting the growth of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with strong backward linkages, and access to capital.

Supported by the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the project hopes to achieve an inclusive and sustainable rural economic development and to provide focused, firm-level, value chain-based, and climate-smart assistance and financing programs to micro and small businesses, through enabling sectoral and trade policies which are designed to provide enhanced access to institutional, regional, and world markets.



**We'd love  
to hear  
from you!**

Send your questions or feedback thru the following channels

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