

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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School coops can cushion financial crisis

With a target market that runs up to millions, a cooperative-run school canteen and centralized school supply store are big businesses waiting to happen.

This possibility looms as the Department of Education renewed its call to strengthen the NEGOSYONG PANG-ESKWELA PROJECT where a cooperative run by teachers can cater to the needs of over 500,000 DepEd personnel and more than 20 million public elementary and high school students

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus said, "The development of teachers' cooperatives at a time when the country is facing the global economic crisis is a real example of how cooperatives can be insulated from the effects of recession."

The recent signing by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippine Cooperative Code of 2008 (R.A. 9520) shows the relevance of cooperatives not only as a very potent tool in poverty mitigation but also in reducing the impact of the global financial meltdown.

The 2008 Coop Code affirmed the provision on school cooperatives. It stated that cooperatives organized by faculty members and employees of educational institutions have preferential right in the management of the canteen and other services related to the orientation of the educational institution where they are employed provided, that such services are operated within the premises of the said educational institution.

Lapus noted that the inclusion of a standard design of school canteen is very important to encourage more school coops.

"A more efficient canteen operation as well as good eating habits among our students can be developed, if we have a well-designed and well-equipped school canteen," he added.

DepEd has been an active supporter of organizing teachers' coops in all 48,000 schools nationwide.

In the hope of encouraging active participation from the rank of teachers, DepEd conducted a Teachers' Consultative Assembly at Baguio Teachers Camp to ensure the commitment of teachers in the implementation of NEGOSYONG PANG-ESKWELA PROJECT nationwide.

Participants included Teachers Dignity Coalition (TDC), Action, Solidarity for the Empowerment of Teachers (ASSERT), Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), PPSTA, Teachers, Inc., PESPA-National, PFTEC, BESTFED-PSLINK, TOPPS/EI, Federation of Teachers Cooperatives and BPSTEA-Benguet.

After the successful pilot testing of the NEGOSYONG PANG-ESKWELA in 48 selected NCR teachers cooperatives in 2008, it will have its nationwide implementation in time for the opening of School Year 2009-2010.

Lapus spoke during the Cooperative Development Authority's (CDA) 19th Anniversary of the signing of RA 6938, the Cooperative Code of the Philippines and RA 6939, Charter of the Cooperative Development Authority.

According to CDA Chair Licera Juarez, cooperatives are never a failure in the country's economic system – owing to the coops adherence to the principle of self-reliance. Unlike other economic institutions that depend on the movement of the global stock market, coops are not likely to experience the same setback suffered by financial institutions.

She added, "Cooperative stakeholders are spared from the repercussions of the erratic interest rates, which often escalate when stock markets fail. Coop members are not subject to the same irregular rates because cooperatives have fixed rate impositions."

The country's 15,000 primary cooperatives, which give regular report, have an accounted asset of around P90 billion, as of December 2008. CDA reported that there are around 70,000 registered coops in the Philippines with about 20,000 actively operating. This includes, of course, the teachers' cooperatives in the country.

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