

PHL needs blue economy for growth

By Stephanie Tumamos

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In Photo: Tuna fishes are displayed at the General Santos City Fishport where they are auctioned.

Story & photos by Stephanie Tumamos / *Special to the BusinessMirror*

In the 2014 Philippine Statistics Authority poverty report, the Filipino fishermen remain the poorest among the nine basic sectors.



Mendoza

The report said that, with 39.2-percent poverty incidence, the fishermen have been living with an average earning of P178 a day, with less to nothing to eat every day.

Despite the country's vast aquatic and marine resources and the numerous research done by the Filipino scientific community in these areas of discipline, the country has still a long way to go to establish a stable and sustainable fishing community that would not only benefit the economy but especially the fishermen.

According to Dr. Ronald Mendoza, dean of the School of Government of the Ateneo de Manila University, during the Visayas Regional Scientific Meeting held in Cebu City on Wednesday, the conservative monetary value that the marine ecosystems should have contributed to the country's economy is estimate at \$970 billion to \$1.5 trillion annually, roughly P74.6 trillion. The scientific meeting was led by the Department of Science and Technology and the National Academy of Sciences and Technology.

With a huge amount of monetary value, it should have contributed, the question remains: How can the Philippines promote economic and environmental sustainability with the inclusion of improving the lives of our fishermen?

Blue economy

One of the biggest marine industries in the country is in tuna. In 2003 the Philippines became the fourth-largest producer of tuna and tuna-like species in the world, yet, Filipinos have been compensated less of what they need to earn.

Records in subsequent years show the tuna sector slowly having been dubbed a "sunset industry". Filipinos have slowly shied away from it, owing to declining catch.

"You see a multibillion-peso industry like the tuna industry and a lot of poor Filipino working in the industry," Mendoza said during his talk as he pushed for the growth of a blue economy in the country. "These are the important figures that we must figure out on how to correct the imbalance."

Mendoza defines "blue economy" as "a version of the green economy made relevant to seas and oceans".

He said, "What we want out of this [blue economy] is not just the extraction [of fishes], it's actually the sustainable management of this particular resource."

The Philippines is the second-largest archipelagic country in the world and has the fifth-longest coastline. It is the center of marine biodiversity as it houses 70 percent of the coral triangle with more than 400 species of corals and over 2,200 species of fish.

It is the 10th country in the world's top fishing nations in a 2014 report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Yet, with all these numbers, the country's blue economy lies in a limbo.

The block along the way to blue economy growth

Mendoza said, “The economic footprint of our maritime economy is very small at this point.” Just about 3 percent of GDP and a total employment of a little over 4.35 percent are being projected in this sector. There are two main problems.

First, Mendoza said, there is not enough investment in this sector.

He said scientists should not just use science and data but also use economics in communicating with politicians. “Tell them that if we invest in this sector, we can create a lot of jobs,” he said in Filipino.

Second, the country should provide solutions so that scientists could translate the outcome of their research into planning and policy. In an interview with the *BusinessMirror*, Mendoza said, “The main hindrance is [that despite] all our good science, we are unable to translate them into policy and action”.

He said, “We know a lot, have researched a lot, even foreign countries have already learned and picked up scientific findings from us and have made decisions out of them for their own growth”.

He added: “Those kinds of studies [are the essentials] in making an industry... If we are able to translate this into business and in the public sector in order for them to sharpen business and policy, that’s where we are missing.”

He urged the scientists: “Who will take it forward, right? That is the area where we need to do a better job—translating it more on public policy and on business strategy.”

Philippine blue economy can take the lead in Southeast Asia

“We’re not good in extracting [our resources],” Mendoza told the *BusinessMirror*, comparing the Philippines to other countries in Southeast Asia that have used technology to create a sustainable maritime industry.

“Our neighbors have been investing in heavily protecting [their areas and resources] and managing them well,” he said.

To highlight his point, Mendoza showed two images during his talk where a Filipino boy carries a 95-kilogram (kg) tuna on his shoulders and earns only a little fraction of the sale, while Singapore is into vertical farming of crabs and selling it at a high price of \$35/kg.

The use of technology has been a great benefit to countries who have used these to their advantage. Technologies, such as drone and growing marine resources in condominiums through vertical farming, are sustainable.

Mendoza recommended that the Philippines needs to exert more effort to catch less fish, and use the research to attain optimum productivity.

“Technology can improve our efficiency and also our ability to sustain our resource better if we only know how to use it,” he said.

Mendoza told the BusinessMirror the Philippines can always take the lead in terms of blue economy since the country has the advantage.

“Space is not a problem nor are the resources because the coral triangle [which area the Philippines occupies 70 percent] is there with us. This should be at the core of our national development plan.”

“We are not that far,” Mendoza said, emphasizing the innovativeness of Filipinos. “This is more of a challenge for collective action on our part and clear planning and foresight—not just for six years but 50 years.”

Stressing the need for collective action, Mendoza said, “If we don’t do the right thing, we will be left behind.”

He said there is a lot of room for improvement and Filipinos need to realize the amount of work it carries. Commenting on the AmBisyon Natin 2040 by the National Economic and Development Authority, he said, “It is part of our long-term vision, and we just need to translate more of this into specific parts of a plan so that it would fall into place”.

Image Credits: [Stephanie Tumampos](#)



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