

Where economic giants tread

... Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) try to trek on the same path. Long term goal: to rise on equal footing with the economic giants. Mission, not impossible, if CLMV's winning weapon would bear the two-in-one insignia: a combination of scientific skills and managerial acumen.

Lifting up quality of human resources

Toward this end, Dr. Arsenio M. Balisacan, SEARCA Director, says that developing countries need to prioritize investing in “education, health, and social capital,” and facilitate people’s access to

“markets and information.”

Dr. Donato B. Antiporta, Senior Policy Adviser at the Policy Assistance Branch of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), agrees to the idea. “I would like to see CLMV countries move into the area of capacity building, [developing its] human resources.” Antiporta also says that what helped Europe, Germany, US, and South Korea develop very quickly is their focus on developing the quality of their human resources.

In very tangible terms, South Korea, for example, weathered the Asian crisis because of the government’s dedication in supporting education and technology advancements. These investments have largely paid off as shown in the country’s track record of having one of the most educated and skilled work forces in Asia (Sours, RBE Asia, 1988).

Specifically, there is a need to “build scientific and managerial expertise to enhance agriculture competitiveness,” according to Dr. Ramesh Jain, FAO representative in the Philippines.

The WTO and related policies

For managerial expertise, Jain suggests that CLMV countries need to thoroughly understand and learn the ropes of negotiating with World Trade Organization (WTO) -related concerns, so that they can contribute to world economy.

Balisacan stresses that if CLMV countries were to be on equal footing with the economic giants, now is the time for them to concentrate on cooking up a “mix of policies and institutions needed to spur rural growth and exploit the benefits of globalization.”

Perhaps, where policies are concerned, the countries of CLMV very specifically have to look into those which would allow them to fare better. For example,

there is a great need to enliven the seed technology/industry in Cambodia. From the technology side, Cambodia has to do a quick policy assessment in terms of seed production. This policy assessment will not only be true for seed, but for other commodities which have high advantage.

On the other hand, although Myanmar can feed the whole of China where rice production is concerned, but what is its policy on rice if government will not trade it because it thinks that it is a strategic commodity?

Compounding the situation is the fact that CLMV are not yet members of the WTO. If they are to be integrated into the WTO wagon, they must be able to decide which of their respective commodities will perform well, and learn the craft of negotiation. WTO, one of the largest trade negotiations ever mounted in the history of globalization, will be a huge and boundless pot of gold for the CLMV countries, if and when they have imbibed in their system technological, marketing, and managerial skills.

Final destination

It is easy to lose a needle in a stack of hay. Dr. Sang Mu Lee, Chair of the Asia Pacific Agriculture Policy Forum (APAP), reminds other country representatives that though CLMV countries have to look at the global perspective, they have to first confine their focus on their own backyard. Dr. Lee says that at the end of the day, the final destination is really to secure the quality of life of the

rural people.

These thoughts were gleaned from the Second Policy Roundtable Discussion on Building Capacities for Agricultural Competitiveness of Transition Countries in Southeast Asia held on 3-4 August 2005 at the Richmond Hotel in Pasig City, Philippines. SEARCA and FAO collaborated on the conduct of the activity, which was attended by representatives from Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Korea, and the Philippines. (LCMalicsi)

