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  - [Breaking News](#)
  - [Editorial](#)
  - [Community Billboard](#)

**COMMUNITY BILLBOARD**

**Solon's tourism support lauded in 3-region forum**



The Abatan river eco-cultural tourism and community tour project and its foremost supporter, Rep. Edgar Chatto, got praises and positive impressions during a foreign-coordinated three-region forum here on the hastening of economic development through cluster strategy.

Department of Trade and Industry Regional Director Aster Caberte said the "Abatan tour has come up with very good products" which she attributed to the dynamic convergence of stakeholders and guidance from Chatto.

Aid institution GTZ of Germany and the DTI are expected to provide the best that they could assist, taking into major account the interaction inputs and the participants' Abatan tour which deepened their insights by actual experience, Caberte said.

"Chatto himself unwittingly convinced the GTZ and DTI to get actively involved in the Abatan initiative even alone in his having brought the house down by his well-applauded extemporaneous keynote speech in the forum," remarked Dir. Emie Roslinda of PROCESS Foundation.

The forum, held at Metro Centre on Thursday as initiated by the German and Philippine government thru the GTZ and DTI under their joint program Local and Regional Economic Development (LRED), focused on accelerating economic development through the approach of clustering local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders.

The other speaker was Dr. Volker Steigerwald, himself the program manager of GTZ-PSP, who articulated LRED and its strategies while Chatto emphasized the importance of inter-LGU cluster or LGU alliances in tapping common resources to attain common development

Chatto recalled having supported the cluster approach of economic development during the time when the concept of Bohol Integrated Area Development (BIAD) was strongly advocated. He was a provincial board member then representing the youth sector as Bohol president of the Kabataang Barangay.

Clustering is empowering the people and strengthening the delivery of projects and services, but "there should be a constant drive of passion for rippled effects to the beneficiaries of our interventions," Chatto said in the forum.

The lead forum participants included Directors Nic Abad, Caberte and Ed Belas of Regions 6, 7 and 8, respectively, Exec. Dir. Emil Cebu of the South Maqueda Bay Fisheries Network in Samar, Fr. Cesar Aculan of the Social Action Center in Calbayog City, Mayette Gasatan of the Bohol Small and Medium Enterprise Development Council (SMED), primemovers and stakeholders of the Abatan river development project and of Padayon BMT (Bohol Marine Triangle), other non-government organizations (NGOs), people's organizations (POs) and stakeholders from the three regions.

They were joined by delegates from LGU alliances/clusters like Mayors Lawrence Teves of Tanjay, Negros, Richard Quezon of Siquijor, Siquijor, Orpheus Fua of Lazi, Siquijor, and Bohol Mayors Roberto Salinas of Catigbian, Apolinaria Balistoy of Cortes, Leoncio Evasco of Maribojoc, Mayor Victoria Chatto of Balilihan and Mayor Cecilia Rebosura of Antequera. The said five Bohol towns have clustered on the Abatan development project.

Forum participants, particularly those from outside Bohol, exclaimed they were wowed by the eco-cultural tourism and community tour products exposed to them in each town stopover along their Abatan tour route. (Ven rebo Arigo)

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