

Building the Technical Expertise of LGUs for the Robust Implementation of Ridge to Reef Approach/Watershed Ecosystem Approach to Local and Provincial Land Use and Development Planning in the Philippines

Activity Report/Completion Report

1. Title:

Meeting with La Union Provincial Administrator and OPPDC

2. Duration and Date:

The courtesy visit and meeting were conducted on September 12, 2025.

3. Venue:

The courtesy visit and meeting were held at the La Union Provincial Capitol, San Fernando, La Union.

4. Content and Methodology:

Courtesy Visit with La Union Provincial Administrator

Following the recent change in leadership after the 2025 Local Elections, a courtesy call was conducted to present the ongoing project to the new governor of La Union, Hon. Mario Eduardo C. Ortega. In his absence, the province was represented by the Provincial Administrator, Dr. Ramon B. Torres.

Dr. Rex Victor O. Cruz, Project Leader, opened the discussion by explaining that La Union was selected as a pilot province for updating its Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan (PDPFP) using the Ridge-to-Reef (R2R) or Watershed Approach. He provided the context behind this selection, citing the project's previous engagement with the Municipality of San Gabriel, which had earlier served as a pilot site for integrating the R2R approach in local land use planning. The success of that initiative paved the way to expand the approach to the provincial level, with the former governor of La Union having been highly supportive of the concept.

Dr. Cruz further explained that the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) now oversees the PDPFP. Although the existing guidelines are still interim, DHSUD is currently finalizing new ones that institutionalize the watershed approach and align it with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) guidelines. He emphasized that applying this approach strengthens watershed sustainability through effective zoning regulations that protect critical watershed areas while promoting economic growth, ensuring a balance between development and environmental conservation.

He also reported that before the elections, the team had completed the identification of development thrusts and initiated the land allocation phase, which would be followed by the land use impact assessment before finalizing the draft plan. However, the process was temporarily paused to allow for leadership transition, recognizing that new administrative directions could influence the finalization of the plan.

Dr. Torres, who previously served as Chief of the Planning Division at NEDA, shared his insights on the planning process and expressed appreciation for the project's ongoing efforts. He discussed the current administration's participatory governance initiatives, emphasizing Governor Ortega's commitment to involving stakeholders in

the planning and decision-making process. He also mentioned that the provincial government is scheduled to conduct planning sessions from October 1 to 4 to align programs and priorities under the new administration.

Dr. Torres recalled La Union's earlier success as a pilot province for the PDPFP, which integrated the efforts of NEDA, DILG, and the former HLURB, a collaboration he helped initiate during his tenure at NEDA. During the discussion, he inquired whether the new framework could streamline or reduce redundant requirements from various agencies. Dr. Cruz explained that through the adoption of the watershed approach at the provincial level, local government units would no longer need to repeat the same processes, simplifying their land use planning responsibilities.

Dr. Torres expressed his full support and willingness to continue the ongoing PDPFP process, affirming the administration's commitment to sustaining the initiative. He assured the team that he would personally brief Governor Ortega on the project's technical aspects and confirmed that no additional Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) would be necessary.

The meeting concluded with a mutual agreement to resume the PDPFP updating process, adopting the Ridge-to-Reef or Watershed Approach as the guiding framework for sustainable and integrated development planning in the Province of La Union.

Meeting with La Union OPPDC

The core of the first discussion centered on the **Townhall meeting and its role in the visioning and formulation** of the agenda for the Governor's first term.

It was discussed that during the townhall meeting, the PGLU consulted with stakeholders (CSOs) to identify problems, root causes, possible solutions, and ways forward. The setup was a conversational consultation, utilizing meta cards and ensuring all participants had a chance to speak and be recorded.

Ma'am Mamaril explained that **clustering** was used to pool concerns, aligning them with a **watershed approach** past workshops and resulting in **five (5) clusters** of output. The visioning process was designed to foster a **sense of ownership** among participants by asking them what they wanted and opening up vision elements without releasing previous vision, goals, or core values.

Data Integration and Planning Activities:

Ma'am Mamaril and Sir Merven then explained that the team will merge data from the townhall meeting and past workshops to comply with DILG requirements and provide input for the vision.

Upcoming Activities and Schedule (Tentative):

1. **October 1–4 (Pampanga):** Visioning and formulation of the agenda for the Governor's first term.

2. **October 15–17 (Writing Session 2):** Proposed PDPFP writing session, a redrafting to finalize the vision, and where the physical framework should be finalized. This will incorporate the new vision and enhance the output from the Baguio session.
3. **November 10–14:** Strategy Planning Workshop (Nov 10-11 booked by PGLU; Nov 12-14 venue still being sought).

APN should shoulder the 13-14 (to be clarified if 12-14 or 13-14)
UPLB's accommodations is shouldered by the PGLU

4. **November 17 (Writing Session 3):** To incorporate outputs from the Nov 10–14 planning workshop.

Physical Framework/Land Use Scenario:

The PGLU is expecting two scenarios for comparison using the InVest:

The **"do nothing" scenario** (existing/business as usual) which is a prediction of what will happen by **2035** without a plan and the **proposed framework**.

The process involves using InVest with Land Capability to incorporate the PPAs (programs, projects, and activities) with footprints into the framework; validating the Land Capability overlayed with land use using InVest; and then running InVest again with the proposed framework.

Finalizing and Approving the PDPFP:

The goal is to present to the **PDC (Provincial Development Council)** by **November 15** (second semestral meeting) for approval to proceed with public consultation with the **SP (Sangguniang Panlalawigan)** by December.

Target for approval of the **Provincial Development and Physical Framework Plan** is the **first quarter of 2026**, or latest, the second quarter of 2026.

5. Participants and Facilitators

Courtesy Call with La Union Provincial Administrator

- Dr. Ramon Torres, CESE - Provincial Administrator
- Atty. Ruby Jean N. Balanon, EnP - Acting Provincial Planning and Development Coordinator
- Mrs. Roshelle Aquino Mamaril - Plans and Programs Unit Head
- Mr. Mervin Medrano - Project Development Officer
- Dr. Rex Victor O. Cruz - Project Leader
- Dr. Vida Q. Carandang - Project Staff
- Mr. Francis Emmanuelle G. Florece - Project Staff

- Mr. Garry M. Oca - Project Staff

Meeting with La Union OPPDC

- Mrs. Roshelle Aquino Mamaril, EnP - Plans and Programs Unit Head
- Mr. Mervyn Medrano - Project Development Officer
- Dr. Rex Victor O. Cruz - Project Leader
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6. Reflections/Concerns/Recommendations/Lesson Learned:

The courtesy visit reflected the new administration's willingness to sustain and build upon ongoing initiatives, as shown by Dr. Torres's expressed commitment to continue the PDPFP updating process that had already been started. His support signified a smooth transition in leadership and a recognition of the value of the work previously undertaken. This assurance provides continuity for the project and reinforces the province's dedication to advancing sustainable and integrated development planning through the Ridge-to-Reef approach.

The fact that the upcoming workshop results are expected to be the same as past workshops is viewed positively by Sir Rex as a chance to **validate** the results. Moreover, there have been significant changes in **Municipal leadership** after the election, particularly in the second district. This likely necessitates a re-convening of the planning team. Which means there is currently **no list of accredited CSOs** and thus no new planning team, which may be a logistical concern, though CSOs have a role in validation/enrichment.

With regards the upcoming activities, the dates mentioned were all tentative, and there are items to be clarified regarding whether APN will shouldering the cost for **November 12–14 or 13–14** of the Strategy Planning Workshop.

There is also the concern/request regarding the delay in UPLB's InVest output for the two scenarios.

7. Appendices

PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

