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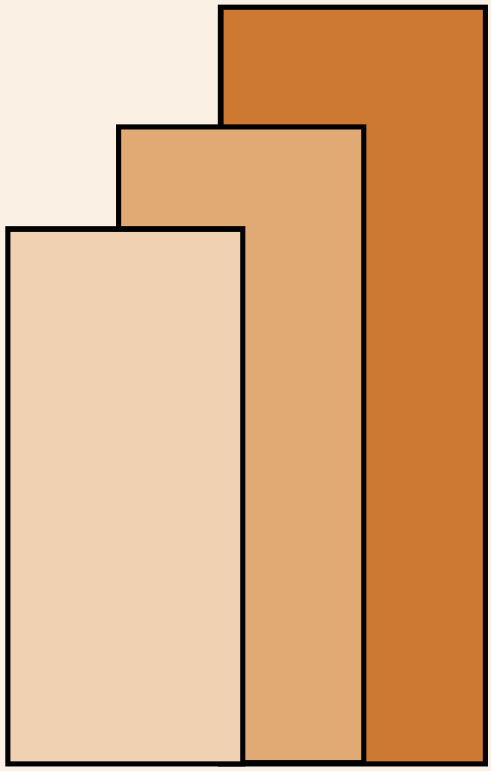

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Metro Iloilo:
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Ruben G. Mercado and Raul S. Anlocotan[1]

1. Introduction

Established in 1890, Iloilo City, located in Western Visayas Region, is one of the oldest cities in the Philippines. Currently one of the major urban centers in the country, the city is densely populated having a small land area (56 square kilometers) and with a population of more than 300,000 as of 1995.

The burgeoning population constricted in a small land area greatly affected the urban functioning of the city. Among other problems, domestic airport cannot be expanded, slum dwellers in the city's commercial district cannot be relocated and solid wastes cannot be properly disposed of. The easiest solution is to expand the city's land area. However, this is an impossible option as the city is bounded in the east by Guimaras Strait with a steep trench making reclamation improbable. On the other sides, the city is bounded by four municipalities of Iloilo, namely, Oton in the south, San Miguel in the northwest and Pavia and Leganes in the north. This dilemma has hounded urban planners to seek viable alternative solutions to decelerate urban blight.

The creation of Metro Iloilo has been a dream of many urban planners and businessmen in the city. The concept involves the formation of a metropolitan arrangement between Iloilo City and its adjacent municipalities within 15-kilometer radius in the province of Iloilo. While it is difficult to establish how this concept was brought to fore, some precursors to its formation can be identified.

In an interview with key informants in Western Visayas Region, the germ for the creation of a Metro Iloilo was first spread by a group of businessmen and eminent persons in Iloilo City sometime in the early 90's. The idea was not given much attention as the city was experiencing its most turbulent period. At that time, the incumbent mayor was fighting for his political survival as he battled with the Department of the Interior and Local Governments (DILG) for the lifting of several suspension orders issued to him by DILG. For several months, the city was placed under the care of the vice mayor who eventually gained the mayoral post in the succeeding elections. The incessant political bickering in the city during the first half of the 90's severely constricted long term development efforts as local officials concerned themselves with parochial matters. The lackadaisical attitude of the *Sangguniang Panglunsod* towards long-term planning even aggravated the lack of coherence in the city's developmental efforts.

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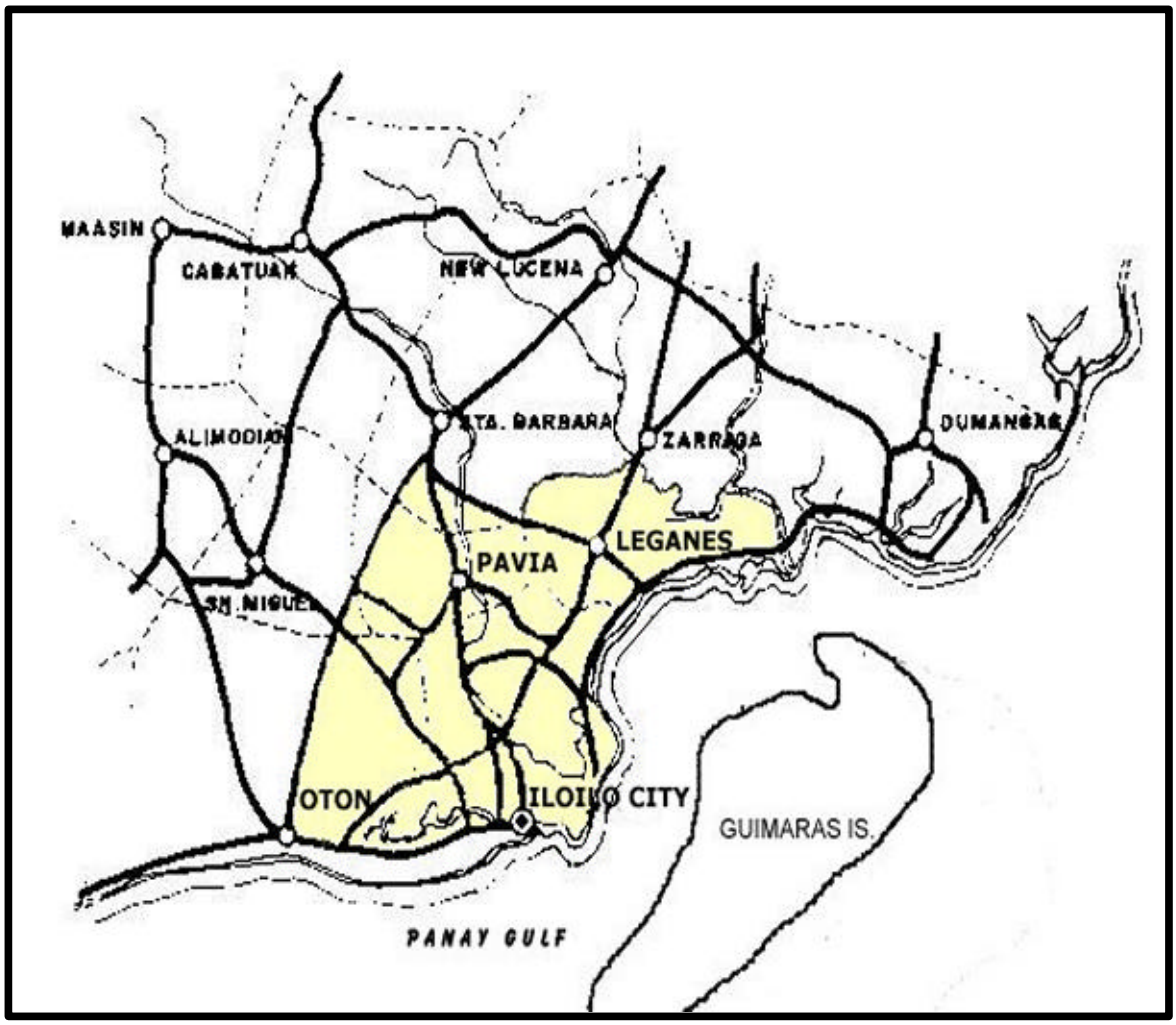
METRO ILOILO



In 1996, the concept was revived. This time, mayors of the four concerned local government units, namely Iloilo City, Oton, Pavia and Leganes met to identify areas of possible cooperation. These three municipalities and the city of Iloilo are the areas identified to constitute Metropolitan Iloilo. With the help of the private sector, a draft memorandum of agreement was prepared for the creation of the Metropolitan Iloilo Development Council (MIDC) to undertake activities under certain identified areas. For this cooperative undertaking to be legally binding, it has to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Code of 1991 which stipulates that a resolution has to be passed by the respective Sanggunian signifying its concurrence to such agreement. All *Sangguniang Bayan* of the three concerned municipalities favorably passed a resolution signifying their concurrence except that of the *Sangguniang Panglungsod* of Iloilo City which to date refuses to concur with the metropolitan arrangement.

The operationalization of the Metro Iloilo concept was stalled by the incessant political stalemate between the present mayor and the *Sangguniang Panglunsod*. In refusing to pass the necessary resolution, the *Sangguniang Panglunsod* argued that the Memorandum of Agreement did not pass through a process of consultation with concerned sectors of Iloilo City. The *Sangguniang Panglunsod* members alleged that the mayor acted on his own and without the *Sangguniang Panglunsod* providing him the mandate to undertake formal arrangements with the concerned municipalities. The members of the *Sangguniang Panglunsod* also alleged that the city of Iloilo will be carrying most of the financial burden entailed by this metropolitan arrangement.

On the surface, it seems that the *Sangguniang Panglunsod* view the issue as not entirely on the substance but rather the process that went through such undertaking. However, there seems to be a deeper issue involved. A comment was made that the Memorandum of Agreement was drafted without a technical study to back it up. There is, therefore, a very unclear understanding and appreciation of the rationale for such cooperative arrangement.

With the foregoing account as a backdrop, this paper attempts to present the initial thinking on the substantive aspects of the aforecited cooperative undertaking in the way local officials view them. This paper will also try to briefly present the crucial steps to be taken to approach the present dilemma. This is with the end in view of effecting a more acceptable cooperative arrangement and organization in the context of the institutional and political arrangements at work in the subject area.

2. Demographic and Land Characteristics

Metro Iloilo, as to its initial compositional definition, has a population of close to half a million that is largely concentrated in Iloilo City (76.5 percent in 1995). Next to CAMADA (Metro Dagupan), among the metropolitan arrangements in the country, it is the smallest in terms of population and land size and the slowest in terms of population growth rate. The slow growth in population reflects the overall low growth rate in the whole Western Visayas Region which has been attributed to significant level of population out-migration (NEDA, 1993). Relatively high growth rate, however, can be observed in Pavia in view of the designation and promotion of the area as the Regional Agro-Industrial Center (RAIC).

Table 1
Metro Iloilo: Population and Land Characteristics

Area	Population Level (1990	Population Level (1995)	Growth Rate 1990-1995	Land Area (sq. km.)
Iloilo City	309,505	334,539	1.47	56.0
Leganes	18,505	19,235	0.83	32.2
Pavia	23,814	26,756	2.21	35.0
Oton	52,125	56,821	1.63	84.6
Metro Iloilo	***403,909***	***437,351***	***1.59***	***207.8***

Sources of Basic Data: National Statistics Office, 1995 Census of Population and Housing

While the present level and growth rate of population in the various areas of Metro Iloilo are quite low, prospects for increased urbanization in the area can be anticipated with the increased vigor to establish infrastructure support for the development of the RAIC and other industrial sites. The spatial expansion of the city towards the north (to the municipalities of Leganes and Pavia) is supported with a comprehensive road network which connects Iloilo City to other points in Panay Island. The latest of these projects is the coastal road opening a second link to the municipalities of Leganes and the adjoining municipalities of Zarraga and Dumangas in the north as well as to the Iloilo International Port Complex. The municipality of Leganes has also started a large-scale multi-purpose land development that will establish it as an attractive industrial and residential zone. The plan includes a reclamation of about 200 hectares of seashore along the Guimaras Strait.

3. Identified Areas for Cooperation

The Municipality of Pavia was identified by the Regional Development Council in the late 80's as the region's center for industrial development. Since then, infrastructure support projects were implemented by different government agencies to enhance the attractiveness of the area as an industrial haven in the region. In the early 1990's, however, the Municipality of Leganes, an adjoining town, started promoting itself as an industrial center. A grandiose plan was hatched which includes reclaiming part of the seashore to give way to an international port, an industrial site and other facilities. A multinational firm indicated its willingness to finance the project through the Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) Scheme.

Confusion as to where the industrial site should be located had ensued. A presidential directive was issued directing the Regional Development Council of Region VI to decide *immediately* which of the two municipalities, Pavia and Leganes, should be proclaimed as the RAIC. The RDC decided in favor of Pavia. This tug-of-war prompted several businessmen to propose that a cooperative scheme between Iloilo City and the surrounding municipalities will avoid this kind of confrontation in the future. They believe that collaboration rather than competition will provide the synergy necessary for the area's progress.

The urgency of the matter prompted a group of well-meaning individuals in the city and the three concerned municipalities to conduct consultative meetings to push through the metropolitan concept. The group, in consultation with the representatives of the four concerned LGUs, proposed the creation of Metropolitan Iloilo Development Council (MIDC) which will be composed of members coming from these four areas. After concurrence by the mayors of Iloilo City and the three concerned municipalities, a Memorandum of Agreement was then drafted and presented to the respective Sanggunian of the concerned local government units.

The draft Memorandum of Agreement listed the following areas for cooperation to be coordinated by the proposed MIDC:

3.1 Development Planning

This refers to the "preparation of medium and long-term development plans including the formulation of projects, investment programming and monitoring of its implementation."

It is envisioned that the areas composing Metro Iloilo will have a common development plan. The present composition is within a 15-kilometer radius. If the metropolitan arrangement is found successful, the area can be expanded to cover the 25-kilometer radius. The plan basically identifies their major development roles so that complementarity of development goals will be assured. Moreover, land use planning will be more coordinated and investment planning will be more rationalized. For instance, the network of road system will be more reasonably designed and implemented if functional service roles will be identified (e.g. Pavia for agro-industry, Leganes for heavy industry, Oton as a primary residential area and Iloilo City as the trade, commercial and industrial center).

Metro Iloilo is seen as a way of sharing benefits especially in logistics and resources. The objective is to provide a venue where issues of common concerns can be discussed and addressed. An example of a possible cooperative undertaking is the water resources that Leganes is willing to share if a formal arrangement can be made with other areas. Leganes and interested investors would like to take advantage of the economies of scale in the development of the water system. According to its former mayor, Leganes has approximately 80 million gallons of surplus water. Several investors have indicated their willingness to finance the construction of water reservoirs and distribution systems provided there is a commitment from other areas to open their markets and to share in the investment cost.

3.2 Transport, Traffic Engineering and Management

This refers to "the formulation, coordination, design and monitoring of policies, standards and programs and projects to rationalize the existing and proposed transport operations, infrastructure requirements with the end in view of integrating into a single network the roads and major thoroughfares of member local government units."

Iloilo City is the center of trade, commerce and industry in Panay Island. As trading center, the city boasts of several shopping malls and supermarkets. It is also

one of the major centers of higher learning in the country, having five major universities including the Visayas campus of the University of the Philippines and a number of tertiary schools. Not to mention is the fact that Iloilo City is the regional center of Western Visayas Region. During ordinary days (especially school days), the city's population bloats significantly. Despite the enormous number of people coming in and out of the city, there are only four exit points, one for each of the four adjoining municipalities.

Worsening the city's traffic problems is the tremendous increase in the number of utility vehicles plying the city's major thoroughfares. Fueled by rising standards of living, car ownership in the city and the surrounding municipalities escalated. Unfortunately, the city shares the woes of other aging cities where the streets are designed to accommodate only the *caretela* and *calesa*. Adding to the traffic problem is the entry of provincial buses and public vehicles to the "city proper" (as the downtown area is called). Currently, buses and other public vehicles coming from the provinces of Antique, Aklan and Capiz enter the city proper where the bus terminals are located. The plan is to locate two bus terminals outside of the city proper, one for southbound buses and another for northbound buses.

The need to design a road network that will ease the ingress and egress of vehicles in the city is imperative. During rush hours, the four exit points are clogged. Collaborative arrangements can, therefore, be made to design a system of roads that will ease the flow of traffic from the city's commercial district to other urban centers in Panay Island. To encourage city dwellers to reside in Oton and the adjoining municipalities in the south, the main road leading to southern Iloilo must be expanded and rehabilitated. Moreover, there is a need to plan for a road network that will open wide tracks of land in Oton for residential purposes.

A road network directly linking Oton to Leganes and Pavia should be carefully studied. This will enable industrial workers in Pavia and Leganes to commute to their residences in Oton without passing through the major thoroughfares of Iloilo City. Presently, commuters coming from the north to the south, and vice versa, will have to pass through Iloilo City.

3.3 Environmental Sanitation, Waste Management and Disposal

This refers to "the formulation, coordination, design and monitoring of policies, standards and programs and projects for proper and sanitary waste disposal. It shall likewise include the establishment and operation of sanitary landfill, incinerator, recycling facilities and related facilities intended to develop an environmentally friendly metropolitan level."

The establishment of a common solid waste management system and facilities will greatly benefit all the concerned entities. Currently, Iloilo City is having difficulty in disposing its solid waste. The current disposal site in the Mandurriao District is being protested by the residents as being too near the residential areas. The identification of a common solid waste disposal site to be located at the outskirts of the metropolitan area (preferably in Oton) will prove to be more sustainable and cost-effective. The needed facilities will not only be built with dispatch through sharing of

costs but their use will also be maximized. Moreover, considering that the selection of landfill site is a contentious issue, it can be worked out so that the recipient municipality will be provided disturbance remuneration or other forms of privileges or compensation.

3.4 Flood Control and Sewerage Management

This refers to "the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects for an integrated and comprehensive flood control system, drainage and sewerage."

Like many old settlements in the Philippines, Iloilo City sprouted at the mouth of major rivers -- Iloilo and Jaro Rivers. As transit point for commercial goods, Iloilo City's economy grew and progressed. As the city became progressive, migrants from outlying municipalities came to reside in the city. The proliferation of squatter colonies especially in the riverbanks took its toll on the environment. Stilt houses were built along riverbanks thereby constricting the flow of the rivers. Adding to these woes are the subdivisions and residential houses in the Jaro District which claimed the several *esteros* (natural floodway) leading to Jaro River. The onset of the rainy season which starts during the month of May and brings heavy monsoon rains prove to be devastating to the residents of Jaro and Lapaz Districts and Pavia. Old residents would claim that only now do they experience floodwaters rise above their roof decks. In some cases, Pavia and Leganes are virtually cut off from Iloilo City for several days, halting commerce and trade between Iloilo City and these areas. The constant flooding of Jaro District and Pavia significantly affected the attractiveness of the latter as agro-industrial zone.

A comprehensive flood control system in the whole metropolis can ease the perennial flooding in Iloilo City and Pavia. A cooperative scheme can be arranged that will involve the dredging of the Jaro River from Jaro District upstream to Pavia and the construction of a network of floodways that will facilitate the flow of floodwater during heavy rains.

Moreover, as the pace of urbanization accelerates, the need to have a comprehensive sewerage system must already be studied. Iloilo City and the surrounding municipalities do not have an efficient sewerage system. Consequently, the underground water aquifer is continuously degraded.

3.5 Urban Renewal, Land Use and Zoning and Shelter Services

This refers to the "planning and implementation of policies, rules and regulations and programs and projects to rationalize and optimize land uses and provide direction for urban growth and expansion."

Iloilo City is constrained to allow varied uses of its small land size. A larger scale for physical planning will allow for a more rational use of its existing land and permit greater economic and spatial links with its neighboring areas. The concept of a Metro Iloilo and the formulation of an integrated land use and zoning plan for the area will synchronize and give more meaning to existing land use and zoning plans and regulations of each of the member-areas. Urban planning and design for the

"metropolis" can look into the identification and development of suitable land for industry, of housing sites for urban dwellers including the resettlement of slum dwellers in the city, of suitable landfill site for solid waste management, among others. It should also see the future in terms of further expansion and implications on infrastructure support to sustain and manage urban growth.

3.6 Networking of Economic Support Infrastructure

This refers to the "identification and implementation of a system of transport networks linking and integrating the various road networks of the member local government units into one big web of roads and thoroughfares."

In addition to the existing four exit points from Iloilo City, a new exit point known as the "coastal road" is soon to be opened. The road will link the eastern coast of Iloilo City to the municipalities of Leganes and Dumangas in the north. The eastern coast has been identified by Iloilo City government as the city's site for industrial development. It is the location of the Iloilo International Port Complex and a number of commercial warehouses. Once completed, it will complement the proposed industrial complex in Leganes and will open a wide area of Iloilo City, Leganes and Dumangas for housing, industries and commercial establishments.

Collaboration between Iloilo City and Leganes is essential for the success of both the Iloilo International Port Complex and the proposed industrial complex in Leganes. Located just less than ten kilometers from each other, the competition between the two ports can result in ill feelings between the two local government units. The proposed MIDC is the best venue for discussing how the two ports can possibly complement each other.

Another major infrastructure support project which will require collaborative effort between the province of Iloilo and Iloilo City is the proposed construction of an international standard airport in lieu of the present airport located at the Mandurriao district in Iloilo City. The limited land area currently serving the Iloilo Domestic Airport significantly restricted the size of aircraft that can land in the airport's runway. The mushrooming of residential houses in the airport's periphery makes aircraft navigation hazardous and difficult. The province of Iloilo is proposing that an airport of international standard be constructed in the municipalities of Cabatuan and Sta. Barbara, adjacent municipalities to Pavia. The new airport will require the widening of the national highway which incidentally passes through Pavia. The construction of the airport will greatly enhance the attractiveness of Pavia as an industrial area as the airport will increase the volume of traffic along the highway.

3.7 Public Safety, Maintenance of Peace and Order and Disaster Management

This refers to "the creation of metro wide police force and the control and supervision of police force in the member local government units…the setting up of mechanisms for the prevention of disasters and effect mitigation of the same."

The four concerned areas have separate police commands. Coordination of police matters is done by the police directorates situated in Camp Delgado, Iloilo City. The current set-up do not create much confusion as police command and

responsibility are well defined and efficiently structured. The present set-up, however, can be enhanced if the maintenance of peace and order is well coordinated in the four concerned areas. A coordinating unit preferably situated at Camp Delgado can be created to coordinate and supervise police activities in the metropolis. Incidents of disaster and crimes like kidnapping, carnapping, robbery, hold-up, hit-and-run incidents, etc. committed within the metropolis can be immediately acted upon if police activities are monitored in one coordinating unit.

3.8 Trade and Investment Promotion

This refers to "the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive investment strategy for the whole area, and the rationalization of investment rules and regulations, with the end in view of developing the whole area into one big economic zone."

The controversy between Pavia and Leganes as related earlier prompted several concerned individuals to resurface the idea of creating a metropolitan entity that will promote Leganes, Pavia and Iloilo City as one investment area. The current practice of separate trade and investment promotion is not cost-efficient and oftentimes conflicting. While the Department of Trade and Industry, the Iloilo Business Club and the Iloilo Investors Foundation, Inc. have devised promotional packages for these three growth areas, they did not result in enhanced attractiveness. What is needed for these promotional packages to succeed is an assurance from investors that industrial development in the area is holistic and well coordinated. Only the formulation of comprehensive and integrated socio-economic and physical framework plans, duly ratified and endorsed by all four concerned LGUs, can achieve these ends.

4. Possible Next Steps

Dealing with the Acceptance Dilemma

The acceptance dilemma will have to be addressed in Iloilo City where it is evident and strongest. Both the substance and the process have to be dealt with.

The basic issue that must be responded to is the provision of a clear understanding of the need to forge an inter-local arrangement. This necessitates a broad discussion of the general concept of the arrangement as well as the specific areas where cooperation will be forged. A concept paper might be needed to invite discussion and raise opinion from various sectors. The paper can articulate the basic discussions and the already established agreements among the leaders of the member-areas regarding the possible arrangement. In this regard, a Task Force can be created composed of mayors and/or representatives from the member-areas to formulate this basic paper.

Defining the Appropriate Institutional Structure

Having a clear understanding of the concept and the objectives of the arrangement, the next step is to identify the appropriate institutional structure to

coordinate such cooperative arrangement. While the draft memorandum of agreement has initially proposed for a council type of body (i.e. the MIDC), there might be a need to consider such in relation with the other alternative structures that may be proposed in the process of consultations that will be held for the purpose. The structure should also be clear about the leadership of the body that will be created as well as how it will be sustained in both organization as well as finance. It should also define how the organization will relate both horizontally and vertically with existing institutional structures in the region.

5. Concluding Remarks

Metro Iloilo is a metropolitan arrangement that is struggling for acceptance and organization. Customarily, the difficulty in forging the cooperation occur in the member-municipalities involved in the arrangement. In the case of Metro Iloilo, it is the city which has caused delay in making a headstart. While the problem may be tagged as something political, it may seem to have brought the need to make a rethinking of the whole concept and objectively assess the real need for such cooperative undertaking. The present paper hopefully can be useful in providing impetus for further discussion through the documentation of the initial thoughts articulated by the local executives concerned on the substance of the desired cooperation.

References:

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National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) (1993) *Western Visayas Regional Development Plan 1993-1998*

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) (1997) *Western Visayas Regional Development Plan 1998-2004*