

Former Senator Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel, Jr., issued a direct call to President Benigno S. Aquino, III to allocate more modular bridges to Visayas and Mindanao, to hasten the rehabilitation of areas damaged by recent calamities.

Mr. Pimentel said he recognized the “unique qualities” of the modular steel bridges and said that these made them appropriate for the conditions prevailing in Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, and Negros Oriental. There are existing stockpiles of modular steel bridge components – supplied by British firm Mabey & Johnson and French firm Eiffel Matiere – which can be assembled “lego-like” within a time frame measured in months, whereas concrete bridges are built over year. “These are easy to deploy and build, and perfect for quickly restoring access to remote areas,” said the former Senator from Cagayan de Oro. “Prevailing humanitarian conditions require fast response, and technology like this is quite effective.”

He pointed out that Typhoon Sendong wiped out 12 major bridges in Cagayan de Oro and Iligan, and a magnitude 6.9 earthquake destroyed another 32 bridges in Negros Oriental. Most of these structures were concrete and can no longer be rebuilt or reused. Modular steel bridges have

the added value of being salvageable, and there is one community in Alimodian, Iloilo, that rebuilt a steel bridge that was washed away by floods during typhoon "Frank" in 2008.

Nene Pimentel said restored access to livelihoods is essential in alleviating calamity conditions in the area. "You must get people in these areas productive again," said Mr. Pimentel. "Besides keeping them busy, the return to their livelihoods brings the capability to earn enough to supplement their needs. Aid packages can only go so far."

He added that building these structures will provide long-term socio-economic benefits. "There are some 5,000 Agrarian Reform Communities in VisMin, but the lands are mostly underproductive because of, among other things, the lack of bridges. Transportation costs and labor costs directly increase because of this limitation of infrastructure, wiping out any surplus income for the farmer," he said. "It's a shame because the Government spends about Php12-billion for these areas, but they still remain underproductive."

Mr. Pimentel underscored the fact that the steel modular bridges, being funded by low cost Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) turn out to be more cost effective than their concrete counterparts, if the total cost is computed against the lifespan of the bridge. He added that the Luzon

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region, being richer in terms of revenues could afford concrete bridges, which normally are paid for via progress billings and funded through domestic sources. “That is another factor to consider. Cost effectiveness combined with long payment terms and governed by strict monitoring from the foreign creditors make this an affordable option for VisMin, given that the income from the region is less.” # # #

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