

## — Job creation through rural tourism development —

**R**ural areas are becoming popular destinations for tourists wanting to experience unique attractions, adventures, and authentic rural food and amenities. This trend provides opportunities for rural communities to develop products and services while generating employment and income. The Philippine government, through its Department of Tourism (DOT), is positioning the country as a key destination in Asia for tourists seeking the rural lifestyle. DOT envisions marketing the more than 7,000 islands across the archipelago based on their unique endowments, colorful heritage, and culture. However, the need to organize rural communities to develop local tourism enterprises is recognized. Improved product quality and upgraded services are critical for robust, sustainable rural tourism development.

Inspired by the APO multicountry seminar on Community-based Rural Tourism (CBRT) in Malaysia in 2007, former participants and resource person Dr. Mina Gabor, President of the Philippine SMEs Development Foundation (PHILSMED), organized a follow-up national seminar, 26–28 March, in Cebu. DOT, PHILSMED, Philippines Convention and Visitors Corporation, and Development Academy of the Philippines cooperated in organizing the project. The APO deputed three international experts under the TES Program and the Secretariat program officer responsible for CBRT projects as resource persons, who were complemented by four local experts.

The seminar was resoundingly successful, attracting 320 participants, or more than twice the original target, from all over the Philippines, representing both the government and private sectors, including tour and travel associations. DOT Undersecretary Oscar Palabyab, who gave the keynote address, attributed the success to timeliness and the focus on the value of tourism to the life of rural communities. He said that CBRT had great potential for job creation, increased demand for local products and services, greater awareness of cultural heritage, environmental protection, and agrobiological diversity. Tourism niches, such as bird watching, whale watching, diving, ecotourism, agrotourism, and rural homestays improve the demographics of the tourism labor force, since jobs are not limited to the hospitality business but create new tourism professionals including marine experts, botanists, ornithologists, and ecologists.

Other topics discussed involved global trends in tourism development, the CBRT framework, community participation in rural tourism project planning and development, sustainable management of natural resources for tourism, ecolabels for rural products and services, and promotion of local culture and indigenous products as part of the tourism package. Participants grouped into regional clusters and prepared marketing plans for their tourism products on the final day for presentation to the entire seminar. 