

Officials on Thursday launched in Maguindanao two multi-million "roads to peace" projects intended to hasten the connectivity of Moro peasants to trading centers where they sell their farm products.

Gov. Mujiv Hataman of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and his public works secretary, Hadji Emil Sadain, led the separate launching of the projects, the five-kilometer P70 million Mercedes-Buldon-Barira road, and the P70 million Marader-Talayan poblacion road in Maguindanao's Barira and Talayan towns, respectively.

The groundbreaking rite for the two projects was preceded by Hataman's ceremonial release, at the Office of the Regional Governor in Cotabato City, of equipment and capital assistance to seven farmers' cooperatives that are recipients of various projects under the ARMM's Health-Education-Livelihood-Protection Synergy (HELPS) Program.

The turnover of checks and equipment to officials of the seven cooperatives was witnessed by ARMM Vice Gov. Haroun Al-Rashid Lucman, Regional Executive Secretary Laisa Alamia and Makmod Mending, Jr., who is the region's agriculture and fisheries secretary.

Sadain said the Barira road project will be bankrolled with an allocation from the ARMM's infrastructure budget while the artery that would connect Talayan's town center to Barangay Marader shall be funded jointly by the regional government and the Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan Program of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process.

The five-kilometer concrete road project in Tayalan will interconnect more than a dozen agricultural enclaves where members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Moro National Liberation Front dwell.

Maguindanao's appointed deputy governor, Ramil Dilangalen, said the presiding chairman of the provincial peace and order council, Gov. Esmael Mangudadatu, had asked the Army's 603rd Brigade and local MILF commanders to help each other secure workers involved in the "roads to peace" projects.

"This is a big help to our efforts to improve the lives of our constituents in areas that were scenes of bloody conflicts in the past," Talayan's former mayor, Hadji Ali Midtimbang, told reporters in Filipino.

Midtimbang, who is the traditional "grand datu" of Talayan, said they are also thankful to OPAPP for helping put up a five-kilometer concrete road designed to hasten the mobility of local Moro peasants.

Hataman said the two road projects could be completed possibly from between December this year to February 2014.

"The two recipient local government units have adequate road-building equipment needed for the concreting of these two roads," Hataman told reporters.

The two projects are among more than a hundred which the regional government launched in recent months.

Sadain said the program of works and funding details for the two projects are open to scrutiny by the media and local civil society organizations.