

If this will continue and with more mayors involved in the initiative, Maguindanao's Moro folks may not at all be affected by any suspension of the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) from Congress.

Two mayors in Maguindanao have already begun addressing the void caused by the PDAF controversy by committing to put up local funds for various projects in their areas.

Mayors Mohammad Ali Guro and Abdulradzak Tomawis of Maguindanao's Matanog and Barira towns, respectively, will put up infrastructure and eco-tourism projects using local "counterpart funds" while waiting for grants from the agrarian reform and tourism departments and whatever assistance Congress can still provide them.

Maguindanao First District Rep. Sandra Sema, who met with the two mayors during her recent inspection of her projects in Matanog and Barira, said Guro and Tomawis are both keen on starting their projects while waiting for assistance from prospective benefactors to fill the void caused by the suspension of PDAF.

Sema's office had earlier constructed a public market and several school buildings in the two towns using her PDAF. The lawmaker had also constructed, through the Army's 603rd Brigade, a water system for a village at Barangay Tugaig in Barira.

Guro, a first-term mayor, said his office is ready to initially fund the construction an irrigation project for about 150 hectares of upland rice paddies in the west of Matanog and the development of a 100-hectare lake along the Secretary Narciso Ramos Highway into an eco-tourism site.

Sema, who is a member of the House committee on appropriations, said she had been assured by the agrarian reform and tourism departments to help put up viable projects in any part of her district.

Matanog is the gateway to the former bastion of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Camp Abubakar, now named Camp Iranun, where the command headquarters of the 603rd Brigade is located.

Tomawis, also a first-term mayor, is also ready to put up a counterpart fund for the concreting of a 6.1-kilometer road that would connect Moro farming communities in Barira to trading centers in Parang town, the port capital of the province.

Sema had been assured of support for the Barira road concreting by the Department of Agrarian Reform through its agrarian reform community (ARC) project.

The adjoining Matanog and Barira towns were both devastated in the 2000 “all-out war campaign” against the MILF by then President Joseph Estrada.

“It is good that these two neophyte mayors are also development-oriented and they don’t want their development efforts to be affected by this PDAF issue,” Sema told reporters.

Sema said majority of the farmers in the two municipalities are Moro rebels and projects that can improve their productivity can complement the cordiality of the on-going GPH-MILF talks.

Sema announced to local officials that she was given by Education Secretary Armin Luistro five additional teaching employment items for Barira, which lacks public school teachers.

Guro and Tomawis both told reporters they did not experience any problem with Sema’s implementation of her projects in their respective towns that were funded by her PDAF.

“But now we have serious problems caused by the suspension of PDAF. All the programmed tie-up projects of our LGUs and the office of Rep. Sema are now hanging,” lamented Tomawis.