

41,000 jobs in Visayas, Luzon

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MANILA, Philippines – At least 41,00 jobs in Eastern Visayas and Luzon will be available to workers laid off due to the global financial crisis, government executives announced.

A government program, called the Comprehensive Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (CLEEP), will provide over 30,000 jobs in Eastern Visayas, according to Presidential Assistant for Eastern Visayas Cynthia Nierras.

Public Works Director for Central Luzon Alfredo Tolentino said 17 firms that won 126 government infrastructure projects worth P5.8 billion in the region are hiring 5,000 workers to help ease the impact of the financial crisis on the labor sector.

In Mimaropa (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), at least 6,000 workers have been given jobs through the CLEEP since it was launched late last year in the region, according to Vice President Noli de Castro.

The CLEEP involves the creation of jobs through government projects and entrepreneurial training.

Nierres said 15 government departments and agencies had been enlisted to provide job placements.

The Department of Public Works and Highways first implemented the CLEEP in Eastern Visayas by holding a jobs fair in Tacloban City last month.

At least 1,000 persons were hired for infrastructure projects during the fair.

The jobs available under CLEEP include membership in the Bantay Dagat (sea watch) and Bantay Gubat (forest watch) organizations in their communities, as well as workers for farm-to-market road constructions, irrigation repair, utility service in public schools, clean-and-green projects, roadside maintenance and flood control projects.

The government will also provide soft loans to those who want to engage in small businesses, such as organic fertilizer production, goat dispersal, swine raising, mini stores, transport business, port stevedoring and fabrication of concrete blocks.

The other government departments and agencies participating in the program are the Departments of Agriculture, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Health, Department of Justice, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Tourism, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Trade and Industry, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Land Transportation Office and the Philippine Ports Authority.

Luzon

Tolentino said construction projects for roads, bridges and school buildings needed machine operators, drivers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, masons, laborers, foremen engineers, surveyors, clerks and medical workers, lists from the Philippine Constructors Association and the National Constructors Association of the Philippines showed.

The projects last from four months to one year, Tolentino said. The DPWH and DOLE job fairs for the PCA and Nacap in Central Luzon followed the one held on Feb. 23 by the DPWH central office, in which 2,300 workers were hired from among 4,800 applicants.

Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. said the agency aimed to create 500,000 jobs through government infrastructure projects within the year.

He said the DPWH regional office and 14 districts in Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac and Zambales had been hiring 2,800 workers every three months for road maintenance work.

The national government stepped up its job-generating campaign as more than 40,000 workers were laid-off since the last quarter of 2008.

In Central Luzon, especially at the Clark Freeport in Pampanga and Subic Bay Freeport in Zambales, the number of displaced workers have reached 3,554 and those working less hours, 6,837, in the last two months up to March 2, the DOLE regional office reported.

De Castro, the Cabinet Officer for Regional Development for Mimaropa, said the CLEEP was being implemented through various projects such as roadside maintenance and the Upland Development Program of the DENR.

He said that under the Grassroots Entrepreneurship and Employment Tourism or GREET, two tourism-related livelihood projects were also approved that created jobs for 95 people in Palawan. De Castro said other regional department officials told him that more projects would be implemented in the coming months to provide safety nets for poor families in the region, especially those affected by the crisis.

He called on the DPWH to fast-track the repair and improvement of roads along the nautical highway.

He instructed the DOT to coordinate closely with the local government executives in identifying and spearheading tourism projects in the region. **Joey A. Gabieta, Inquirer Visayas and Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon; Cynthia D. Balana in Manila**