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Title:

**PHILIPPINES TO PHASE IN THREE-YEAR SOLAR ENERGY PROGRAM**

Summary:

MANILA, Apr 19, 2000 (AsiaPulse via COMTEX) -- The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has been designated to implement a three-year program to provide solar-powered electrical systems to some 74 agrarian reform communities (ARCs) in 41 provinces all over the country.

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MANILA, Apr 19, 2000 (AsiaPulse via COMTEX) -- The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) has been designated to implement a three-year program to provide solar-powered electrical systems to some 74 agrarian reform communities (ARCs) in 41 provinces all over the country.

The project, called the Solar Power Technology Support Project to Agrarian Reform Communities or SPOTS, will be funded through a US\$50 million (about P2.3 billion) mix grant and soft loan from the Agencia EspaQola Cooperacion Internacional or the Spanish Mixed Credit Facility.

DAR Secretary Horacio Morales Jr. said the project would spur agri-business and community and social development in the countryside as the remote communities covered by the project were energized.

At the same time, he said, the project would boost the national government's efforts to tap non-traditional or alternative sources of energy.

Morales had discussed the project with officials of the Spanish government during his official visit to Spain last year, where he met Philippine foreign partners to seek their support in augmenting financial and technical support for the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), and visited a one-megawatt solar plant in Toledo.

He said the department would implement the project with the Department of Energy (DOE), the National Electrification Administration (NEA), local government units, non-government organizations and affiliated non-conventional energy centres.

Morales said SPOTS was an integrated social development project that aimed to address poverty through the provision of basic needs such as potable water supply and electricity.

The program, he said likewise sought to increase agricultural productivity, create livelihood opportunities, empower local communities and farmers' organizations and promote sustainable development by using solar power technology.

The project would provide energy or electricity that would be generated by solar panels and stored in battery banks. Each household would be provided with equipment that could supply energy for two lamps for at least four hours a day, one black and white television set and a radio.

School children would also benefit because they would have longer study hours, according to the feasibility study of the DAR.

The system was expected to increase backyard poultry and piggeries and enable household members to become involved in other livelihood activities.

The solar system, for instance, would provide pumped water for livestock and/or drip irrigation for plant nursery and high-value crops.

Morales said the agrarian reform beneficiaries could engage in a series of agri-business activities such as egg incubation and chicken hatcheries.

He said the community would benefit because solar power would supply electricity to the barangay health clinics and town halls, schools, the potable water supply system and street lights.