

Duterte reassures support to science, R&D

By Stephanie Tumampos
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The Duterte administration gave reassurance of its commitment to the science, technology and innovation sector. This was established in the big increase in the budget of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) this year.

In a speech by President Duterte, delivered by Budget Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno during the opening of the National Science and Technology Week (NSTW) 2017, he said the DOST's budget has quadrupled in the last seven years "from P5 billion in 2010 to P20.8 billion in 2017."

The department's role in providing science and its benefits to the people has, indeed, broadened by aiding Filipinos both in research and entrepreneurial ventures, where science, technology and innovation can be applied, he said.

"Meanwhile, the budget for research and development [R&D] grew by nearly six times over the same period of time, from P1 billion in 2009 to P5.8 billion in 2017," Duterte said in the speech at the NSTW held at the World Trade Center in Pasay City on July 11.

The President also noted that the national government has been able to set an organized management of scientific activities, such as formulating programs and policies that help shape the country.

"I am pleased that over the last few years, the science department and the country's S&T base have become more outward-oriented and attentive to the growing needs of its constituents and stakeholders while keeping their ears close to the ground, paying close attention to the latest trends, developments and issues that affect both the domestic front and the global community," he said.

'Science for the People'

Meanwhile, Science Secretary Fortunato T. de la Peña said in his speech at the same event, "It is time to reacquaint the nation with the very reason we pursue science, technology and innovation: for the benefit of the Filipino people." The 2017 NSTW celebration is focused on the theme "Science for the People".

As Duterte has said in his 10-point economic agenda that S&T must create an avenue for development in various sectors, such as in economy, de la Peña highlighted that the fruits of science "should ultimately reward the society and the people to which we belong".

Technology transfer and commercialization of R&D results is one of the focus of the DOST. With this, the department has shifted 10 percent of its overall budget to technology transfer.

"The result was we were able to generate 1,000 new intellectual properties in just one year that can be adopted and harnessed toward the good of our constituents," de la Peña said.

Duterte also lauded the DOST for putting top priority to technologies and services that push the national agenda to spread economic growth throughout the country, citing the department's great potential in alleviating social and economic conditions of Filipinos.

"I have constantly reminded everyone in the government that I want to see a hastened development of our regions," Duterte said. "This is a good way of reducing inequality, which we observe development-wise and income-wise."

Addressing certain perceptions in science, he said S&T will not automatically make everything better. "S&T developments and research outputs will be positive contributions only if they will be utilized to the maximum,

whether by industry and business, by government agencies, by community, or by education sector,” he said.

Space program

Besides the basic and applied research, Duterte’s speech specifically expressed the current administration’s support to the Philippine Space Technology Program. “This makes official the country’s entry into the frontiers of space,” he said, adding that the country needs to boldly move and catch up with the industrialized world, “in every measure of scientific and technological proficiency”. With a 2017 budget of nearly P150 million, de la Peña, in an interview with the Business Mirror, said manpower for this sector needs more investment.

It should be noted that the Diwata-1 satellite, which was launched in 2016 and finally put the country’s flag in space, was made by Filipino scientists that were sent to Japan by the DOST.

The Diwata-2, which will be launched in 2018, has improved capabilities to better monitor the country. It is being made by another batch of Filipino scientists and engineers, creating a pool for this industry.

International communities have also been interested in the planned space program. During the President’s visit to Russia, de la Peña, who was with the entourage, visited Moscow’s space agency.

“The Russian government has expressed to us its interest in helping the country in terms of space,” he told the Business Mirror. “They [Russia] said that if we are serious with our [space] program, they are willing to help develop our R&D program.” A memorandum of agreement for the cooperation between Russia and the Philippines is seen to materialize soon.

Also, the investment for space will not be for naught in the economic sector. De la Peña said, “There is an industrial component when we invest in space technology.” Manufacturing hardware components for space technology can be one economic venture the Philippines can do.

“We can even go into the commercialization of satellites,” he said. “Of course, that is a long shot but we have to start somewhere.”

Most important, de la Peña noted that space technologies must be utilized also in other sectors, such as in agriculture and disaster preparedness. “We have to make use of the technology in monitoring our agricultural crops or preparing for disasters.”

Reference

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