

Strategic Local Development in Rodriguez, Rizal: Enhancing Local Industries and Educational Institutions for Sustainable Employment

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Abstract

Rodriguez, Rizal—historically a relocation hub for informal settlers—has become increasingly residential but lacks corresponding employment growth, resulting in widespread commuter labor. Residents face long travel times, social strain, and limited access to local employment due to mismatches between labor skills and local job availability. This study explores how local industries and educational institutions can be strategically developed to foster sustainable employment and reduce commuter dependency. Using a qualitative-descriptive research design, the study employed thematic analysis of responses from 10 purposively selected stakeholders, including local business owners, local government officials, and academic administrators. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework to identify recurring themes related to employment generation and educational alignment with labor market needs. Findings revealed key strategies for local industry development, including the

utilization of agricultural resources, support for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and the establishment of local economic zones. On the educational side, stakeholders emphasized industry-academe collaboration, contextualized curricula, and community-based technical-vocational education. These approaches align with the Four Pillars of Sustainability—economic, environmental, social, and human—and highlight the potential for place-based development to improve job accessibility and community resilience. The study concludes that strategic local development in Rodriguez requires coordinated actions from the government, industry, and educational sectors. Enhanced infrastructure, policy support for entrepreneurship, and responsive education systems are essential to address labor-market mismatches. When institutionalized through policy and community participation, these efforts can foster sustainable, inclusive growth within the municipality.

Keywords: *strategic local development, commuter labor, sustainable employment, local industries, educational institutions, labor market mismatch, technical-vocational education, MSME support, Rodriguez Rizal, inclusive growth*

INTRODUCTION

Commuter labor refers to the routine movement of workers from their place of residence to distant employment locations without relocating permanently. This phenomenon is especially evident in peri-urban and suburban areas where job opportunities are limited, compelling residents to seek employment in nearby urban centers. Rodriguez (formerly Montalban), Rizal, exemplifies this trend, having evolved into a residential hub primarily due to its role as a relocation site for informal settlers from Metro Manila and the affordability of its housing.

Despite its expanding population, job creation within the municipality has not kept pace. The daily migration of workers to nearby cities has resulted in long commute times, increased transportation costs, and reduced quality of life, particularly for those whose skills do not align with local job offerings. Similar patterns have been observed in global metropolitan areas like Tokyo and Osaka, where rapid residential expansion outstripped employment growth, emphasizing the need for strategic local development.

According to the 2020 Census, Rodriguez has over 443,000 residents, yet continues to rank low in local economic growth. Although it performs moderately in economic dynamism and employment generation, many residents report experiencing time poverty, family disruption, and social detachment due to commuter labor. These realities point to a labor market characterized by skills mismatches, undervalued local employment, and inadequate visibility of nearby job options.

To address these gaps, this study explores the insights of local business owners, government officials, and academic administrators to determine how local industries and educational institutions can help reduce commuter dependency and address skill mismatches in the labor market. Anchored on the Four Pillars of Sustainability (Spangenberg, 2005; UNESCO, 2009), this framework serves as the foundation for proposing a Strategic Local Development Program (SLDP) that promotes sustainable, inclusive local employment.

The researchers of this study believe that reducing commuter dependency and promoting local job absorption requires a dual strategy: enhancing institutional and industrial capabilities while aligning human capital development with real labor market needs. This research is intended to inform policies that support economic self-sufficiency and local resilience in Rodriguez.

Research Questions

1. As observed and suggested by the local business owner and LGU official respondents, how can local industries be developed or expanded to create sustainable employment opportunities within the area of Rodriguez, Rizal?
2. How do LGU officials and academic administrators, and personnel respondents assess the role of local educational institutions in reducing commuter labor and skill mismatches in the labor market of Rodriguez, Rizal?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design using thematic analysis to explore the perspectives of selected local stakeholders on the development of local industries and the role of educational institutions in addressing commuter labor issues in Rodriguez, Rizal.

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires administered to a purposive sample of 10 key informants, composed of five local business owners, five government officials, and academic administrators or personnel. These respondents were selected based on their involvement in local development efforts, education, or enterprise. All participants were 18 years old and above and had direct knowledge of labor and employment trends in the municipality.

The open-ended questions were designed to elicit rich, contextual responses on the opportunities and barriers to sustainable employment creation and the effectiveness of local educational institutions in bridging skills gaps. Responses were coded, categorized, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and insights that could inform strategic recommendations.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics review committee, and formal permission was secured from the local government of Rodriguez. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. No incentives were provided.

Thematic analysis was conducted manually and guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This qualitative approach allowed the researchers to derive meaning from stakeholder perspectives and propose strategic solutions based on grounded local realities.

The researcher strictly followed ethical considerations throughout the study. Confidentiality, data protection, and academic integrity were maintained, and all data collected were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study derived from open-ended responses by 15 key stakeholders in Rodriguez, Rizal—specifically, five local government officials, five business owners, and one academic administrator. The purpose was to explore sustainable strategies to reduce commuter labor and enhance the role of local education in addressing employment and skills mismatch in the municipality. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, identifying recurring patterns across stakeholder perspectives.

1. Development and Expansion of Local Industries to Create Sustainable Employment Opportunities

Theme 1: Utilizing Local Resources and Agriculture for Sustainable Industry

Most of the respondents highlighted Rodriguez, Rizal's abundance of underutilized agricultural resources. LGU representatives and entrepreneurs promoted organic farms, agro-processing facilities, and community-supported agriculture as ways to revitalize these local resources. These programs would create jobs locally, promote environmental sustainability, and lessen food insecurity.

"We have land and manpower available, but in order to truly benefit from our agriculture, we need investment in post-harvest processing and community marketing," said an LGU official.

This aligns with Spangenberg's four pillars of sustainability, which include the economic and environmental pillars. The growth of local raw material-based industries can encourage environmentally conscious production, decrease reliance on supply chains, and create circular economies.

Theme 2: Incentivizing MSMEs and Local Business Growth

According to business owners and LGU officials, Micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) need a more supportive and encouraging environment. They recommended the following: Tax incentives, startup capital, and the establishment of a municipal business hub to support nascent entrepreneurs. Participants emphasized the difficulties local business owners face as a result of high operating expenses and a dearth of marketing and finance expertise.

The owner of the company stated, "We need structured support and training to help them thrive. Many small businesses here close within a year."

Boosting local entrepreneurship helps reduce reliance on Metro Manila for jobs requires boosting local entrepreneurship. Supporting MSMEs ensures local wealth creation and community empowerment, which is consistent with the economic and social pillars of sustainability.

Theme 3: Establishing Local Economic Zones and Industry Clusters

Respondents proposed the development of local economic zones (LEZs) to attract investors in manufacturing, technology, and services. Business respondents suggested converting idle municipal lands into light industrial or logistics parks, which can provide direct and indirect employment.

"We lack infrastructure that invites investors. A logistics zone or agri-tech park can provide hundreds of jobs here." – Business Owner.

According to this view, by establishing local alternatives, place-based economic planning can reduce the need for commuting labor. It embodies the systemic approach to local development that includes policy support, business ecosystem development, and infrastructure.

3. Role of Local Educational Institutions in Reducing Commuter Labor and Skill Mismatches

Theme 4: Enhancing Industry-Academe Collaboration

All respondents from the education sector noted that curricula often fail to match the skills demanded by local employers. There was a consensus on the need for structured partnerships between educational institutions and local industries, through mechanisms such as internship programs, industry co-developed short courses, and certificate-based skill training.

"We must realign course offerings based on actual job demands. Otherwise, students will always look for jobs elsewhere." – Academic Administrator.

These observations highlight the value of developing curricula that are responsive, as this is a key component of the human sustainability pillar and gives students employable skills that prevent them from having to relocate in search of employment.

Theme 5: Promoting Contextualized and Place-Based Learning

Academic administrators emphasized the importance of making education relevant to the local context. They proposed integrating community needs, local industry case studies, and indigenous knowledge systems into school programs. This helps students recognize the economic potential in their communities and become agents of local transformation.

“Our students must be taught to innovate locally, not just to dream of working in the city or abroad.” – Academic Dean.

This is in line with the social and human pillars, producing socially conscious and empowered citizens who care about the development of their local community.

Theme 6: Community-Based Training and TVET Programs

Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs are desperately needed to upskill underemployed residents and out-of-school youth, according to a number of LGU officials and academic staff. These could include short-term courses in caregiving, construction, digital freelancing, urban gardening, and food processing, offered at barangay centers or local colleges.

“We can reduce commuting if people are equipped with practical skills they can use for local jobs or home-based work.” — the education officer for the LGU.

The emphasis on TVET reflects the inclusive and equitable development goal of the sustainability framework. It ensures that educational systems also serve excluded and disadvantaged communities.

Synthesis of Findings

The study concludes that in order to decrease commuter labor in Rodriguez, Rizal, multi-sectoral cooperation, contextualized education, inclusive economic growth, and local resource optimization are required. All parties involved want to see a municipality where people may live, work, and study without having to move.

Key insights include:

The need to decentralize economic activities and bring industries closer to communities.

The importance of skill matching and curriculum realignment to reflect real labor market demands.

The empowerment of the local workforce through community-based training, entrepreneurship support, and place-based education.

These themes attest to the fact that nearby educational establishments serve as both hubs for learning and engines of economic growth. They have the power to transform commuter culture and build resilient, self-sustaining communities when they are in line with local business plans and LGU planning.

Summary of Findings

Local Industry Development

Four critical topics for improving local employment and economic resilience were identified through thematic analysis of the insights from five key informants, who were local company owners and LGU officials in Rodriguez, Rizal:

Priority Industries for Growth: The industries with the highest potential for employment

1. **development, according to the respondents,** are tourism, ecotourism, agritourism, bamboo crafts, cement and tile manufacture, and recycling. These sectors gained recognition for their scalability, capacity to hire low-skilled labor, and compatibility with regional resources and cultural norms.
2. **LGU Roles and Interventions:** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of LGU-led initiatives in improving infrastructure (e.g., roads, digital connectivity, utilities), offering financial and regulatory support, and enabling access to national programs through TESDA, CHED, and DOT partnerships.
3. **Employment Creation Strategies:** The professionalization of eco-tourism guides, promotion of cooperatives, livelihood skills training, and community-based entrepreneurship (e.g., “Buy Local” campaigns) were suggested to build grassroots employment and stimulate local demand.
4. **Infrastructure and Environmental Readiness:** Unreliable utilities, inadequate digital access, lax zoning enforcement, and underdeveloped tourism attractions like Wawa Dam are some of the main obstacles mentioned. In order to draw in both tourists and investors, informants emphasized the importance of having clean, secure, and visually appealing public areas.

Role of Local Educational Institutions

From interviews with four LGUs and academic informants, the following four key findings emerged on the role of educational institutions:

1. **Curriculum and Labor Market Alignment:** A mismatch persists between educational offerings and the employment needs of local industries. Programs are often geared toward opportunities in Metro Manila rather than supporting local sectors such as tourism, retail, agribusiness, and manufacturing.
2. **Training Delivery Gaps:** There is a pressing need to upgrade facilities and shift toward short-term, modular, and skill-based training in fields such as digital marketing, food processing, and technical-vocational trades. Respondents also called for greater integration of soft skills development.
3. **School-Industry-Government Collaboration:** Stronger partnerships between schools, the LGU, and the private sector are needed to facilitate internships, job fairs, and cooperative-based learning to ease the education-to-employment transition.
4. **Development of Priority Skills:** Practical and locally relevant skills—such as freelancing, eco-tourism, digital literacy, tailoring, and community enterprise—are essential to reduce labor outmigration and create alternative livelihoods within Rodriguez.

CONCLUSIONS

Local Industry Development

The environmental, human, and cultural resources required to create a robust, inclusive local economy are all present in Rodriguez, Rizal. However, because of legislative and infrastructure barriers, the potential of sectors like bamboo crafts, eco-tourism, and agritourism is still underused. Strong LGU facilitation—through transparent governance, business incentives, and inter-agency coordination—is critical to enabling industrial growth.

Community-based employment strategies are also central. Promoting internal economic circulation and lowering reliance on urban labor markets can be achieved by fostering entrepreneurship, aiding cooperatives, and cultivating local talents. Establishing a favorable atmosphere for investment requires addressing physical infrastructure and the preparedness of tourism sites.

Role of Educational Institutions

According to the study's findings, local educational institutions have a critical role in changing Rodriguez's job situation. There is a pressing need to shift from degree-focused curricula to practical, market-responsive, and skills-based education, even though current programs meet some labor market demands. Without systemic alignment, schools risk perpetuating labor outmigration.

Collaboration between schools, the LGU, and industry is fundamental in creating a pipeline of skilled workers who are prepared for opportunities within the locality. Infrastructure enhancement, capacity-building of educators, and the integration of real-world applications into school programs are necessary for maximizing the developmental role of education in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of the study on commuter labor and employment opportunities in Rodriguez (Montalban), Rizal, the following suggestions are put forth to help local legislators, academic institutions, and business stakeholders. These doable tactics aid in the establishment of a **Strategic Local Development Program (SLDP)** that aims to improve local employment, lessen reliance on commuters, and foster inclusive, sustainable growth:

- **Give industries like eco-tourism, agritourism, bamboo processing, recycling, and cement production top priority** in order to create local economic drivers. These sectors should be at the core of the SLDP to expand employment opportunities and reduce the need for residents to commute outside the municipality.
- **Invest in utilities, internet connectivity, and transportation networks to strengthen economic enablers** and infrastructure. In order to draw in investors and create more jobs locally, efforts should also be taken to maintain and improve local landmarks like Wawa Dam
- **Encourage MSME growth** by offering tax breaks, easily accessible funding options, and expedited business registration procedures, particularly for ventures that cater to local consumers' interests, such as sustainable crafts, local food production, and services.

- **Establish social anchoring and soft skills programs** that emphasize problem-solving, cooperation, and communication. To encourage local workforce retention, these must be combined with social support networks, including mentorship and community recognition.
- **Enhance access to employment information** by establishing a Rodriguez-based job portal, utilizing barangay job boards, and ensuring collaboration among TESDA, DOLE, and educational institutions to improve job visibility and matching.
- **Reorient cultural views on work** by launching values formation campaigns that elevate the dignity of local employment. Sharing success stories of local workers can shift perceptions and encourage the youth and residents to pursue careers within the municipality.
- **It was also highlighted to align education with local industry needs** by revising curricula to incorporate industry-based training, digital literacy, agribusiness, and green job preparation. Strengthening on-the-job training (OJT) and internship partnerships will improve transition into local employment.
- **Establish community-based training hubs** at the barangay level offering technical-vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and microfinance access. Youth, those who are not enrolled in school, and other marginalized groups
- should be served by these hubs.
- To ensure durability and influence throughout shifting leadership, institutionalize the SLDP through a municipal ordinance. These programs will be easier to execute, manage, and collaborate across sectors if they are incorporated into policy.

By implementing these suggestions, Rodriguez, Rizal can lessen its reliance on commuter work, move toward a locally anchored, self-sufficient labor economy, and provide other LGUs dealing with comparable labor migration and employment issues with a repeatable model.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The researchers ensured that all ethical criteria were strictly followed during the entire investigation. After being fully informed about the goals and objectives, procedures, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any fees, all participants provided their informed consent. Throughout the study, no identifying information was exchanged, and the confidentiality and anonymity of every participant were strictly maintained.

The welfare of the respondents was surely safeguarded by ensuring that participation was non-intrusive and voluntary. The study's conduct was free from conflicts of interest, according to the researchers. All sources were correctly cited in order to prevent plagiarism, and all interpretations of the results were given impartially and objectively. The information gathered was only used for scholarly and research purposes.

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