MEDIA RELEASE

From micro to medium:

DOST steps-up assistance to "Apo ni Lola" thrive in food processing business

The façade of the two-story store of Apo ni Lola Pasalubong Center in Talomo, Davao City.

True to its mantra *"*agham na ramdam,*"* the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) continues to bring science and technology interventions to various parts of the country to advance the quality of life and expand businesses through its programs and services.

One of its flagship initiatives is the Small Enterprise Technology Upgrading Program (SETUP), which aims to help micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) adopt technological innovations, boost productivity, and improve competitiveness by providing financial assistance and technical assistance.

Since its inception in 2002, the DOST's SETUP has helped over 100,000 MSMEs in the country, with a focus on priority sectors such as food processing, furniture, gifts, decors and handicrafts, agriculture, marine and aquaculture, and metals and engineering.

One of the successful stories of SETUP is the decade-old family business Apo ni Lola in Davao City.

Apo ni Lola Pasalubong Center is a food processing enterprise established in 1993. The company produces a wide range of durian-based products like candies, jams, and even pastries, which became popular with tourists and locals.

According to its Operations Manager Yasmin Abaa, the company started as a micro enterprise, but in 2022, it grew with around 80 employees and four outlets within the city.

"Hindi naman talaga from 'rags to riches', pero 'yan kasi 'yung kwento ni Sir Jojo. Kasi nag-start talaga 'yung story niya from kubo pa lang talaga. So, from the transition ng delicacies, meron din tayong transition sa ating building or structures," Abaa said in an interview.

Abaa is referring to Arnel "Jojo" Raakin, the grandson of Abondia del Puerto Raakin, also known as Lola Abon.

According to DOST-Davao, it was in 2011 when Apo ni Lola started reaching out to DOST for technical assistance to improve its packaging materials and label design. Through the financial assistance of around P500,000, the enterprise was able to purchase equipment like a double-jacketed mixer, continuous band sealer, and coding machine.

After the successful intervention, the enterprise requested another assistance in 2015 to improve the production of its tropical fruit products. Through the SETUP, DOST-Davao provided an estimated PHP1.3 million for various production equipment and tools. The agency also provided training and consultancy services like food safety, occupational health and safety, and cleaner production.

Since Apo ni Lola's products became a hit, their line has expanded to over 90 products as of now. This includes durian and ube candy jam, durian yema, mangosteen yema, and durian and langka bar. For pastries, they offer durian pie, macaroons, piaya and hopia.

Its café, located right inside their main branch in Davao City, also offers beverages like durian coffee blend, durian tablea, and durian shake.

“Before kasi, wala pa talaga kaming baking department. So, nung may intervention na kami [mula] sa DOST na binigay sa amin, we have pastries na rin po. Nagdagdagan talaga ‘yung consumers din namin kasi hindi na lang walk-in eh, meron din tayong online,” Abaa said.

With these improvements over the years, and with the rising local demand for their products, Apo ni Lola expressed its intention to request another assistance under the SETUP for the third time to further expand its production.

In a project visit as part of the Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Week (RSTW) in the Davao Region, Abaa said they are planning to purchase a packaging machine for their *“yema”* candies, additional coffee machines, and freeze dryers, which may cost an estimated PHP1.5 million.

“‘Yung ini-aim talaga namin is the machine for our yema candy. Kasi ‘yung demand talaga ng market ngayon, minsan nagkakabusan talaga kami ng candy dito. For example, nag-Kadayawan [festival], Araw ng Davao, then may mga conventions sa Davao City, minsan wala, ubos talaga ‘yung nasa shelves namin,” Abaa said.

Meanwhile, DOST-Davao Regional Director Anthony C. Sales assured that the enterprise will be given a chance to avail another assistance as long as they adhere to the terms and conditions of the SETUP.

Moreover, DOST Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr. said he already lifted the maximum availment of twice per enterprise.

“Ni-lift ko na yan. Dalawa ang aking ginawa, ni-lift ko ang maximum of two times assistance. And regional directors can now approve up to 5 million [pesos],” Solidum said.

More than the financial assistance, Abaa said they opt to seek SETUP to avail of the technical assistance it provides.

“Iba din talaga ‘yung intervention na natutulong ni DOST sa amin. For example, for the packaging machine. Si DOST kasi, [they] have the equipped personnel that can help us in the competition, for example, sa packaging,” Abaa said.

The success of Apo ni Lola as an enterprise is proof that science is felt across all sectors—be it in communities, in the academe, industries, and even in MSMEs.

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From left: Apo ni Lola's Operations Manager Yasmin Abaa, DOST Undersecretary for Regional Operations Sancho A. Mabborang, DOST Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr., and DOST-Davao Regional Director Anthony C. Sales tell the history and achievements of Apo ni Lola through the DOST's SETUP. The visit is part of the RSTW celebration in the Davao Region on October 15-17, 2026.

About RSTW

The Regional Science, Technology, and Innovation Week (RSTW) is an annual event organized by the DOST regional offices across 17 regions. This celebration showcases local technologies, research and development (R&D) projects, and innovative initiatives that connect communities, local industries, and stakeholders with science-based solutions. These efforts promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development in the region. The RSTW is one of the major scientific events leading up to the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Week (NSTW) celebration, which will be held in General Santos City in November. For more information, visit www.dost.gov.ph or the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Week (NSTW) Facebook page. ***(By***

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